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# Geographies of information behaviour: A conceptual exploration

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**Abstract**

Purpose: This article examines the relation between place, space, and information behaviour.

Approach: Concepts of place and space are explored through a comparison of three leisure pursuits: running, urban exploration and genealogy, based on the authors' research and the published literature.

Findings: A socially constructed meaning of place is central to each leisure activity but how it is experienced physically, emotionally, and imaginatively are different. Places have very different meanings within each practice. Mirroring this, information behaviours are also very different: such as the sources used, the type of information created, and how it is shared or not shared. Information behaviour contributes to the meanings associated with place in particular social practices.

Research limitations/implications: Meaning attached to place can be understood as actively constructed within social practices. Rather than context for information behaviours in the sense of an outside, containing, even constraining, environment, the meaning of place can be seen as actively constructed within social practices and by the information behaviours that are part of them.

Originality/value: The paper adds a new perspective to the understanding of place and space in the study of information behaviour.

Keywords: leisure pursuits; hobbies; information behaviour; place; social practice; space; the social construction of meaning; context.

Classification: Conceptual paper

## Introduction

Physical space is often seen as the context for information behaviour. A simple example would be the way that sheer distance could act as a limit on information seeking. However, the nature of context is itself much contested in our field (Courtright, 2007; Agarwal, 2018). Context is indeed often seen as the setting, environment or background to the subject of interest, the information behaviour. It is then treated as an objectively describable set of conditions that shape behaviour. It is easy to see how space could be treated in those terms, when it is so often defined in terms of precisely measurable distances and coordinates. Yet, at other times context is seen as defined in relation to a specific information actor, as person-in-context (Courtright, 2007). Here what is salient about a specific place would be defined by the actor and their information need. A further conceptualisation recognises that the person is embedded in the context (Courtright, 2007). Since individuals are influenced and can influence their context, the two must be seen as interwoven. Here "context is not something that describes a setting; it's something that people do." (Dourish, 2004). Applied to place it would imply that it both shapes social action and is shaped by it.

Geography is very often conceptualised merely in the first sense of context as a setting for the real activities of interest. But we suggest that this needs to be reconsidered. Indeed, as Gibson and Kaplan (2017) observe, LIS has "not developed a coherent, complex body of theory related to place, space and information behavior" (p. 131). This paper seeks to enrich this theorisation. We take as our starting point Savolainen's (2006) summary of how space has been treated in information seeking. This reflects the way that space is typically seen as context for information behaviour: an outside container often constraining information seeking. It has also featured recurrently in metaphors for information behaviours, like information seeking.

We suggest that an alternative perspective would be to recognise the ways in which the meanings attached to particular spaces, when they are experienced as places, are actively constructed within social practices including the information behaviours that are woven through those practices (Harrison and Dourish, 1996). In simple terms it would be useful to differentiate "objectively" measured space and meaningful place. To illustrate the value of this approach, we examine three pastimes: running, urban exploration and genealogy, drawing on our own published research on these topics (cited below) and the wider literature. While there are no details in our presentation of these pastimes that have not been reported in previous empirical work, by ourselves or others, we draw out new theoretical significance from these characterisations through this space versus place distinction.

The analysis reveals the very different spaces used and how they are used differently. Indeed, the meaning of place is defined differently within each social practice. We

argue that rather than seeing spaces a as bounding limits on information behaviours, how places are used, felt, and understood are shaped by the wider social practices within which information behaviour is framed.

**Space in the study of information behaviour**

Savolainen (2006) has established the importance of space, including metaphors of space, in information seeking. He identifies three broad approaches to its treatment, reflecting different metatheoretical assumptions about human agency:

1. The objectifying approach, based on a positivist set of assumptions that sees space as having objective characteristics beyond human control and tending to act as a constraining structure on information seeking behaviour, for example: distance, security, or obstruction, reducing access to information. Savolainen (2006) interpreted information foraging as potentially an example of this approach.

2. The realistic-pragmatic approach which recognises more human agency in choosing how to navigate through spatial aspects of information or take control over it to make information activities easier. Information grounds and information pathways are examples of this viewpoint.

3. The perspectivist approach uses space as a metaphor for how information resources relate to the individual, as in the notion of information horizons or landscapes (Lloyd, 2006; Savolainen, 2020).

This analysis suggests that in various ways the characteristics of a space are likely to shape how information is sought (and by extension used and created). A simple example is sheer distance. Thus, Gibson and Kaplan (2017) identify typical zones of information seeking in terms of *distance*, such as home, local, regional, and long distance, as distinct from a *base,* within which different social groups seek for different types of information. Their findings reveal the wider geographical range of information activities of richer people. Clearly, then, factors such as proximity have some impact on ease of access to information. We need to know more about how the physical properties of spaces constrain or indeed facilitate information access. But it also seems to be important to consider how these attributes of space are thought about by information users themselves. We know that what feels close may be different from what is close in terms of objective distance.

Perhaps the most well-known example of an information theory that relates the characteristics of place to information behaviour is the notion of information grounds (Fisher and Naumer, 2006). It identifies the physical and social features of certain types of place where information flows particularly freely. This notion draws heavily on the notion of "third places" as locations with characteristics different from home

or work (Oldenburg, 1989). The theory identifies features of places that make them a good context for information gathering, such as their accessibility and unpretentious appearance. These features attract people to behave in particular ways and break down the barriers to communication about certain types of information. Information grounds are essentially defined by their social dynamics, but these are to some extent framed by physical features of geographical spaces. Presumably, there are corresponding characteristics that would restrict information flows, though this does not seem to have been investigated and theorised in the same way. The logic is that physical space is always or often an important aspect of the context of information seeking, and we might be able to identify the characteristics that promote or block information seeking depending on factors, such as the type of information sought or characteristics of the users.

Another example of this thinking about what makes a space good from an information perspective is explored in the large literature on the design of information spaces, such as libraries, archives, and museums (e.g., Cox and Benson-Marshall, 2021). Interest in what makes particular library spaces attractive or conducive to study is another aspect of space discussed in the library literature and could be seen as about how space shapes information use (and learning). The growing popularity of libraries as spaces to study has led to the flourishing of ethnographic and user experience (UX) studies of how library space is used. However, this work is not necessarily theorised as information behaviour, rather to notions of informal and social learning.

Some models of information seeking are suggestive of the role of movement within space and its links to information seeking. Thus, several classic information seeking models, such as information encountering (Erdelez, 1999), foraging (Pirolli and Card, 1999), and berrypicking (Bates, 1989), although intended to explain information behaviour as a whole, have strong suggestions in the metaphors they develop that physical movement through an environment might be important to how we gather and use information. They imply that, as we physically move about a space, we may be actively or accidentally uncovering information. Lueg and Bidwell (2005) take up this point to examine information berrypicking as a description of how people find their way through unfamiliar physical locations. There is also a potential to link to work that has been done on corporeal information and theories of embodied information (Lloyd, 2010; Lueg 2014, 2015; Cox, Griffin and Hartel, 2017; Cox, 2018). If our bodies are central to gathering and using information, so the physical space within which they are located and through which they move must shape this in significant ways. In his book on reading, McLaughlin (2016) suggests that where we read - be it the library, metro, park, or bathroom - affects the experience of reading. This implies that how any information source is used is shaped by the relation between the characteristics of the human body, the medium, and the wider physical environment within which it is encountered. We lack a full explanation of how this

works, but it does suggest that space crucially influences information behaviours, such as absorbing information from a source like a book.

**Place as an object of information seeking**

In addition to work that explores the role of space and place as contexts shaping information behaviour, because they are aspects of where the activities take place, there are a few studies that explore discovering information about a place itself. The literature about wayfinding is the most obvious body of work concerned with finding out about place, specifically about the navigation of it (e.g., Mandel, 2017). Its main thrust is to study how individuals negotiate spaces with the objective of providing better information for them to navigate more efficiently to get to where they want to go.

However, we often want to know more than simply how to navigate through a space; we may wish to find out many things about a locality. In one of the few information-based studies that has explored the question of how we know about our own locality, Williamson and Roberts (2010) conducted interviews with residents of Darwin, Australia to discover where they gained knowledge of the city, chiefly about its history. Their results suggest the importance of passive absorption and encountering of information, rather than purposive information seeking in finding out about the place where we live. The four main sources were found to be:

1. People (friends, local networks)
2. Certain public events (special and recurrent)
3. Newspapers
4. Physical markers, such as blue plaques

This is a useful starting point for considering how we know about the places we are in, but the focus is on historical knowledge, because of the authors' connection of it to a sense of belonging. The history of places where we live is surely only part of the information we gather about a locality.

Other important work on how we know about our environment is revealed in Lingel's (2015) work on the information tactics of migrants to a city. She finds that wandering is among the key approaches to finding out about a city for a newcomer, and she explores how this is shaped by personal histories. Thus, for a mechanic from Korea, the location of garages and the state of the roads were notable features of the city; a student studying fashion mentioned the shops. This points to the way that certain features of place are more salient and meaningful to one actor than another.

There are other pockets of research about place as an object of information seeking. Bishop's work (2011) explores how people seek local information online and is concerned with how to handle queries about a locality. However, it seems there has

been relatively little published in information behaviour literature about what people want to find out about places and how they seek this information.

**The research problem**

Thus, space and place have played some part in the study of information behaviour. They are primarily seen as aspects of a containing context within which information behaviour plays out. Often, they are seen as constraints or limits, such as the impact of distance on access to information. However, there are also some strands of thought that suggest that features of a place as context could shape information behaviours positively, such as promoting information sharing. These might be applied to the design of information service spaces, like libraries. A very limited body of work examines information seeking about places as such. Given the importance of meaning attached to place, this relative neglect is somewhat surprising, all the more so, because theories of information behaviour often use spatial metaphors, such as foraging and berrypicking.

What Savolainen's (2006) analysis does suggest is that information behaviour literature has tended to treat the geographies of information through a few particular lenses. These may be useful and valid perspectives, but they neglect the sense that geographies are socially constructed. Savolainen (2006) shows how the meaning attached to place begins to take account of how space is constructed actively. The realistic pragmatic accounts he identifies begin to see that we actively shape the environment we operate in. The perspectivist viewpoint shows that we often understand information seeking through a metaphor of movement. Perhaps we can take this further and reflect well established thinking in geography, for example, from such authors as Harvey (1996) and Massey (2005), and first reflected in the broad information science arena by Harrison and Dourish (1996), that the meanings of place are socially constructed.

This work suggests that while it might be useful to see space as capable of being defined in very precisely in objective terms of longitude and latitude or GPS coordinates, the meaning of a place is much more complex, qualitative, and contested. The physical location of the United Kingdom, or London, or Buckingham Palace can be defined precisely in a seemingly objective way, albeit through a culturally produced system with its own assumptions (Dourish, 2006). However, the connotations of these places are too rich and fluid to define simply or definitively. These place names elicit rich cultural associations, but they are not shared by everyone. Places mean different things at different times. So, the meanings and identities associated with a particular place are social constructs, some sort of sum of facts learned through school, news stories, pictures in magazines and images in the media, personal visits and experience, and even fiction. Much of the image is shared,

but not all, and such connotations are complex, fluid, and potentially contested. Information we are exposed to clearly shapes and is shaped by such perceptions.

One way to think further about this would be through examining specific social practices and the ways that these actively use and construct meaning around. The question would then be how information behaviours fit into these meaning making processes. To explore the value of this perspective, this paper examines the role of space and place in three leisure pursuits - running, urban exploration, and genealogy - based on the authors' previous research and the wider literature. The descriptions offered summarise what has already been published by ourselves and others. The novelty of the paper lies in the theoretical significance developed from the comparison. The three practices work well to explore the range of ways place is constructed because they have a very different feel from each other, such as in terms of level of physical engagement (active runners compared to sedentary genealogists) and the centrality of traditional information activities such as looking up information in a library (arguably rare among runners but common among genealogists). The underlying demographics are also very different with urbanex mostly practised by young males and genealogy largely a pastime of the elderly. This diversity strengthens the plausibility of the argument that place is actively constructed within nearly all social practices.

The analysis addresses the following questions:

1. What role does place play in each leisure practice?
2. What information activities occur within these practices and how do they serve to construct place?
3. What does this tell us about the relationship between place, space, and information behaviours - and what is the implication for the conceptualisation of place and space as context?

## Place in three leisure practices

### *Running*

Running, an increasingly popular form of physical activity, is usually undertaken for its perceived benefits to health and well-being. While historically dominated by men, increasing numbers of women also run. Given its accessibility as an activity, running can include anything from the occasional jog in the park through to committed long distance racing. Runners generally identify with particular distances of runs, such as 5K, 10K, or an ultramarathon. It is often practised individually; but serious runners also participate in running clubs (Shipway *et al.*, 2013). Mass participation events punctuate the runner's career, marking levels of achievement and sometimes linking to charity fundraising. GPS-enabled smart watches and activity tracking devices and

apps are increasingly used to document the pastime, supporting sharing of results online with family, friends, and wider communities of fellow runners.

Running is inherently situated in space through movement across it. Running on the spot or on a treadmill may offer an exception; in this case, running is relevant to a fixed place. However, most running is about moving through space. Runners have favourite places to run, be that a particular trail or a familiar circuit; they also participate in mass running competitions in particular locations. Although routes in races are generally set and marshalled, in some forms, e.g., ultrarunning and orienteering navigation, is also part of the skill set required. Part of the attraction of running can be exploring the local environment, though, typically, routes are circular and so are tied to a convenient starting point.

Running is a fleeting, temporary presence in a space, because it is defined by linear movement through it, rather than prolonged occupation of it. The runner's presence makes little demand on a place. Indeed, given the focus of many running enthusiasts on timed runs, the purpose of running is to move as speedily through space as possible.

Runners typically use particular types of spaces: public, open spaces, such as roads, paths, and other rights of way, or run in open spaces, such as parks or trails. Only serious competitors use specialised running tracks to a significant extent. The use of space is influenced by time, not only in terms of time of day (some may run in different places at night), but also by time of year and other temporal cycles, e.g., when weather conditions favour running).

The demands of running produce a very particular sense of the geography of the locality, as the runner seeks safe routes or particular types of terrain, such as hills, for particular forms of training. For example, safety information about a given terrain may be associated with other users of a place, such as dogs and dog walkers. Women runners often complain of various forms of nuisance behaviour by others, including threatening and abusive behaviour. This may lead them to use space somewhat differently, e.g., avoiding running at night (Allen-Collinson, 2011). Thus, the information experience of space is gendered. Runners will often run together, experiencing a kind of shared geography of space. Social negotiation of the meaning and socially accepted use of public space is inherent to running, with negotiations of the place occurring between runners and other users of the place, e.g., pedestrians and dog walkers. In addition to running in specific locations, runners engage in information activities around the physical task of running (Hartel *et al*., 2016). They gather information about where they might run, e.g., use maps or find out common running routes from others (Gorichanaz, 2017a, b). They move across constellations of types of information both documentary and embodied (Gorichanaz, 2018).

Running is experienced directly through information from the body, by various sensory stimuli and proprioceptive (position of the body) and kinaesthetic (movement) experiences (Hockey and Collinson, 2007). The changing vista, the smell of grass, the temperature, the feel of the surface underfoot, and the rhythmic movement of the body are modalities of information that contribute to a very particular and individual physical experience of space. Different levels of fitness and ability shape this. However, runners may wear headphones, as a form of cocooning, to control information from the external environment, by blocking with music the localness of the auditory environment of a place. This combined with the fleeting presence in places may disconnect them from their surroundings.

Increasingly, step counters, GPS-enabled watches, and other trackers mediate and codify the embodied information experience of running (Mckinney *et al*., 2019). Data are stored and analysed for comparison over time. Routes may be displayed on maps, and with analysis of gait, cadence, and speed. This potentially allows minute retrospective analysis of the condition of the body (heart rate, cadence, speed) in space (e.g., on a particular hill). Analysis requires particular forms of information and data literacy. It could also be seen as a growing commodification and metrification of human experience. Certainly, although running is an intense physical experience of space, there is also a commitment to "objective" geographical measurement, in terms of capturing distances and times, to calculate speeds and measure performance.

Identities related to running are often defined spatially by the length of distance preferred or best times for a distance, be that 5km, 10km, half marathon, marathon, or ultramarathon. The quality of place may also be defined through particular types of terrain, such as differentiating between road running from trails or fell running. The level of achievement (Personal Best at certain distances) is key to identity.

Runners often share information, including videos and photos, about their runs digitally with others in running communities, such as on Strava or Facebook Groups. Knowledge of good routes is a focus of information sharing, e.g., for training or discussing particular events for the level of difficulty to achieve a "personal best." In this sense, place becomes an object, around which information sharing and competition happens. Sophisticated information creation happens through running blogs or videos, which relate narratives of the experience of running within runners' lives. Many runners talk about achieving a running high. Yet narratives of running (especially ultramarathon running) are often tales of suffering, though usually with a positive inspiration, because, with help, the seemingly impossible feat of finishing was achieved.

*Urban explorers*

Urban explorers or *urbexers* venture into abandoned structures to capture them visually through high quality photography as they move through that space (Fulton, 2017, 2021). They are most often younger, physically able men entering alone or possibly with a very few fellow urban explorers. As with running, place plays a central role in urban exploration, though the places are very different ones. The objective is to visit and document abandoned structures, such as military installations, underground sewers, tunnels, farm houses, factories, hospitals, etc. While some urban explorers choose to visit multiple types of buildings and sites, others focus on a particular type of location.

Urban exploration sits on the fringe of socially acceptable activity. Urban explorers often trespass in the course of their activities. Because abandoned structures may also be derelict, place can also pose physical danger. In spite of the legal and safety issues around entering abandoned structures, urban explorers often enter premises without hesitation and alone. It is probably these features of exciting risk that attract young males because it aligns to some aspects of male identities, pointing again to the gendered nature of the social practice and its treatment of space.

They may have permission to enter premises or, quite often, they may trespass. The motto of urban exploration generally is "take nothing but photos, leave nothing behind," though not all sub-communities subscribe to this ethos and may graffiti locations. They may spend significant time on reconnaissance of a site before conducting an exploration. Urban explorers also often research the history of the buildings they visit, and may share this information with selected photographs on the Web, or publish collections of their photography as art. This makes them intensive consumers and producers of information about places.

Information activities, such as documenting experiences and sharing information about places, are central to urban exploration, but these activities have unique patterns. Urban explorers take high specification photographs of the location to document their visit and share with other urban explorers, and sometimes, selectively with the general public via social media and the Internet. Their use of photography enables them to create a narrative about the place they visit, with a very particular flavour. Urban explorers are highly aware of their documentary function in the sites they choose, and they suggest their activities facilitate historical documentation and preservation in memory (Fulton, 2021).

Creating the perfect image of a place visited is core to urbex. Urban explorers will sometimes stage photographs, placing items they find in particular positions for dramatic photographic effect – despite the principle that one is not meant to disturb or change things. As such, place is the object of the pastime, in particular of

photographic activities. When they enter the site, they take high spec images and sometimes video of the place; some urban explorers also stage photographs, e.g., re-organising items in the abandoned space for dramatic effect, and move through the place in a particular order they set.

Although urban explorers treat place as something to document and share, they also treat it as something to keep hidden from others, including other urban explorers. Secrecy enables the urban explorer to exert a form of ownership over a place, so that they can revisit and photograph it again, as well as to try and ensure the place remains undisturbed by others. Urban explorers are competitive, comparing photography and site visits.

Because urban exploration is a highly secretive activity, time also plays an important role in the pastime, with urban explorers strategically visiting decaying locations at night or at times when no one else is likely to discover them. So their use of place is distinctive, both in terms of where and when it is visited. In addition, time places a critical role in urban explorers' documentary practices, in which they may remove images from public view on websites and social media platforms. What is left is a digital trace of the urban explorer's activities, which serves as a document in of itself, adding to social memory of these activities and the community (Fulton, 2021).

The secretive behaviours that attend urban exploration are enacted both in the physical exploration environment and the digital space where they share and interact with other urban explorers, expanding the boundaries of urban exploration activities. Urban explorers may share their photography via social media and websites, though much sharing takes place in deeper web spaces where only approved fellow urban explorers can access content. Protected digital repositories of content use place to hide them, as well as the identities of explorers who illegally entered physical locations. This implies quite high levels of information literacy and skill in managing information about place.

This hidden community has its own accepted cultural norms which play out through their interactions with place. The identity work achieved through the pastime is closely linked to particular types of places and particular ways of using them, including using and creating information about them.

*Genealogists*

Amateur genealogy or family history is a popular pastime in many countries, particularly among older people of either gender, that is people who may often be retired and have time to research their family tree (Fulton, 2009; 2016). Genealogy involves information that may be in print or digital formats, free or accessible at a cost, and available through multiple heritage, archival, and library organisations, both

on and offline, as well as informally shared with other participants online, in face-to-face associations, etc. Genealogy may be time intensive, involving a commitment that spans years.

Genealogists view place as an integral part of their pastime. The process of finding information about one's family is at least partly grounded in physical location. While the genealogist's initial exploration of family may be primarily focused on finding a family surname (Duff and Johnson, 2003), the records they use frequently involve not only naming the family connection, but also placing that person in time, place, and, by implication, wider social and political events. Formal records generally include geographic locations of the creation of the record, place of birth or death or marriage, burial plot, place of census taking, and other place-related information that contextualises historical lives. Similarly, informal sources of information, such as family members, family Bibles, and oral family histories, serve as significant sources of information which often include information about place. Using these sources implies a high level of information literacy, although the ways sources are used may not always accord with how an archivist or historian would deem acceptable (Yakel and Torres, 2007).

These sources are essential for proving a chain of family connections, in which the genealogist uses place to establish relationships between records and people. Filling gaps in the family tree around immediate relatives often leads to more complex searches, expanding to extended family to help build a main trunk of family information, then depending on the perspective of family history, expanding to wider information about family members which necessitates a broader information search. For instance, the genealogist may consult records, such as passenger lists for overseas migration, manuscript records of tenancy, photographs, specialised databases compiled by other genealogists, etc., which carry information about place related to particular family members. This exploration of sources may include a complex, multi-layered consideration of place, which may deepen alongside the genealogist's continued discovery of information.

The latest trend among genealogists is DNA analyses to widen their reach through time, prove relationships with individuals and family groupings, and establish linkages with regions around the world. The recent and growing popularity of DNA testing has expanded family history, with place remaining a core aspect. The test results provide a breakdown of originating countries and regions around the world; genealogists then work to tie this information to life events and individuals in their family tree.

Genealogists use place to help establish and verify family connections. This may lead to linking families with historical events, in particular, events that others will recognise and perhaps admire, for example, United Empire Loyalists in Canada or

Daughters of the American Revolution in the United States, the significance of each lying with the political side of the event taken. An event, such as the Salem witch trials can also serve to weave history and social significance around ancestors in a given place. This connecting of place, time, and history holds a tension between objectively trying to identify people and subjectively attributing a meaning of a given place to them.

Place also implies a connection to land and home; owning land held social significance. For example, Irish landowners were historically from wealthier groups. This privilege marked by place is demonstrated in historical records; the genealogy of place is well documented, with landowners remembered. Tenants may sometimes be remembered in landowners' records of rents paid, but without a connection to land, they can be missed in the record.

Critically, place is used to construct an understanding of origins and identity (Nash, 2002; Timothy and Guelke, 2008). Discovering where an ancestor lived and where they emigrated to and from helps to tell and interpret their story and, in turn, is linked to the family historian's own story and history, and further connects them to wider historical events. In this way, a geographic area, country, or locale may be seen as defining a family history. Such imagined connections often rely for their depth of meaning on wider historical narratives and connotations attached to certain spaces and histories. It is this search for cultural meaning and national identity that genealogists, from places, such as Australia or North America, may actively seek.

For some genealogists, the search for knowledge of place has particularly deep meaning, since some will travel to other regions to "walk in the steps of their ancestors" as genealogical tourists. Certain locations, such as where an ancestor was born or lived, even where a house has changed or has disappeared, can be particularly important to genealogists. These visits enrich constructions of connections to ancestors, eliciting feelings of belonging or empathy (Lambert, 2006). They are likely to be captured through photographic records of the visit.

Another way that place influences genealogy is through the character of the settings in which genealogists pursue the pastime. The place in which genealogy occurs has a role in shaping information behaviours. For example, exploring records in an archive forms a particular form of engagement with information, which implies tasks, such as navigating record office search rooms. The feel of the practice is partly shaped by the character of the places where it is carried through. This is very different from the places where running and urban exploration take place. Genealogical fact-finding happens in settings designed specifically for information activities. The digital information environment adds another dimension to genealogy, serving to connect genealogists and records across the world, and to do so much more quickly than the traditional processes of the pastime.

The creation of information through genealogy also acknowledges place. As genealogists gather information, they also create new information, from family histories, scrapbooking activities, and collections of family artefacts to more formal publication of local and community heritage information (Fulton, 2016). A gap in the record motivates the genealogist to create information to fill that familial gap (Fulton 2016), often answering questions, such as where a relative seemed to vanish over a period of time. Genealogists may create a digital record of their family history, which they post publicly online. Because they may also take note of other information in the course of research, e.g., a name study to gather information widely about a family grouping, they may publish this research to assist other genealogists. Information that is created adds to the wider genealogical literature and tells a story about a given place. This act of creating new information builds on the work of other family members and community members, developing a collective of information.

**Discussion**

On close examination, place features prominently in all three leisure pursuits outlined in this paper. All three communities spend time in physical spaces engaged in their pastime, although the locations relevant to each and their activities in these places differ. Each has a specific and different way that space is used, as well as how place is experienced emotionally, physically, imaginatively, and informationally. Each pastime has its own geography.

Most fundamentally, the places used within the pastimes are different. Running is invariably in public spaces, be that urban roads and parks or rural paths and trails. Urban explorers, by definition, go into particular private spaces and particular types of abandoned buildings. Genealogists' engagements with ancestry and cultural heritage may connect with a particular house or gravestone, but also may be linked to an ancestor's origins or time spent in a town, region, or country.

How these different places are experienced also differs. Running is a fleeting, but intense embodied encounter with a linear route in a landscape. Urban exploration also involves physical exertion, but it is more likely to be a slower, walking exploration of a particular space in a more intensive way, sometimes at night. Urban exploration involves legal and physical risk. Running is strenuous, but rarely risky. Genealogy is an imaginative exploration of connection to the symbolic and emotional meaning of place, in combination with foundational information activities carried out in archives or libraries. Genealogy reflects mobility of people over time, that is the migration of individuals historically. Though the genealogist might visit a place of interest, the encounter still has largely to be imagined. It is not that this element of symbolism is absent in urban exploration, which draws on the symbolism of certain types of building and of "decay." Similarly, running a trail symbolically connects the runner

to nature, but running itself is often inherently construed to be natural. In each case, these symbolic elements contribute to the identity work that lies at the heart of the pastime.

Information behaviours, as aspects of the social practices of the pastime are also different. Information seeking and place are closely associated in each, given participants' needs to locate information about places in places. However, what this looks like is very different in each case. Runners find and respond to information through the embodied, sensory experience of the body, as they encounter features of a landscape, such as hills, or the weather in a place. They also search for routes in more traditional information sources, such as maps, and after the run, they might review data online in the comfort of their home. Urban explorers sometimes research buildings and structures before exploring them, but the most valued information is largely acquired in the place itself, in photographic terms, and is interpreted aesthetically. Information for the genealogist usually comes in rather traditional forms, such as historical documents discovered in libraries, archives, and increasingly through the Internet. They learn to navigate complex records involving place in locations, such as archives and libraries. Thus, all three practices demand forms of information and data literacy, but somewhat different ones.

Documentation of place also forms a significant part of activities for all three groups, though the approach to creating information again differs. Formats of information are different, and the ways they are shared are also different. In the past, runners might have kept a physical running diary; now, they increasingly keep digital records of their runs, including distances and speeds, captured via wearable technologies, such as smartwatches and activity trackers. They might also record a run through photos on Instagram or a video taken with an action camera, like a GoPro. This information is shared with friends and fellow runners through sites, such as Strava. Urban explorers produce blogs and videos, but the primary form of documentation is a high-quality photograph and sometimes video. Such information is shared in a very controlled way; urban exploration is a secretive world, partly because the aspect of legal transgression. Urban explorers may share images publicly via digital platforms, then decide to unshare them, leaving only a digital trace of their online presence. Genealogists gather and record evidence to support facts about ancestors, scrupulously noting places of birth or where someone was on a census date, focussing on their migrations. Increasingly, they use DNA sequencing similarly to establish relationships and to delve more deeply into geographic origins. They publish their accounts of place through multiple venues, for example, blogs, webpages, family history society magazines, historical society publications, scrapbooking activities, or family trees shared with their extended family. They often share information on the understanding that they will gain information in return.

Digital space is used by all three groups, though the digital geography is different. Runners share information about their runs with other running enthusiasts via sites, such as Strava, as part of motivation and competition with other runners. Urban explorers also share via the Internet, though often deeper areas of the Web, and social media channels and urban exploration websites. Genealogists use the Internet to find, create and publish, and share information, e.g., in personal blogs or individual or institutional genealogy websites. The speed of digital communication has transformed genealogy, by enabling people to find and connect with others quickly and easily. Similarly, the digital space has influenced communication for runners and urban explorers, supporting immediate sharing and enabling all participants to become potential creators of information.

Experiences of a given location are unique to the pastime. For instance, while running is a fleeting but intense, embodied encounter with a linear route in a landscape, genealogists might focus their information seeking around a particular location, and then spend time in that same location to deepen their nostalgic, even numinous experience. Urban explorers also devote time to particular locations, taking time to take photographs to document the location in detail, and perhaps returning to the location to repeat or expand on the experience. While urban exploration might involve physical and legal risk taking, an emotional sense of excitement, and euphoria, running is strenuous, but less risky. Each pastime has its own physical and emotional landscape.

How place is imagined differs between the three practices. When genealogists visit places of interest, they may try to imagine the life experiences of their ancestors lived out in a particular place. They use a form of historical imagination, one that professional historians might not approve of. Urban exploration draws on the symbolism of certain types of buildings and structures in decay to achieve a particular aesthetic of place. Similarly, running a trail symbolically connects the runner to nature; running, itself, is often inherently construed to be natural in some way. In each case, these symbolic aspects of place contribute to the identity work that is accomplished. The pastimes draw upon and actively construct meanings of place which reflected a certain authenticity in a pastime: for genealogists, the supposedly authentic story of their family; for urban explorers, the authentic penetration and ownership of a secret place; and for runners, the authenticity of an embodied encounter.

**Table I: The geographies of information behaviour in three leisure pursuits**

Table I summarises some of the differences in how space and place are shaped in the three leisure activities.

Thus, place is more than something in the background, a context for information behaviour, limiting or even enhancing access; it is an object of information seeking, information sharing (and secrecy), and information creation in its own right. Urban exploration involves research about the history of a building, then the documentation of its current appearance. It is animated by a strong sense of the character of place and its significance; is also active in constructing nostalgic, dramatic, or even numinous representations of a place. Genealogy can share this vivid engagement with place, e.g., when a genealogist visits a place where an ancestor lived or was buried. The sense of place contributes to identification with an ancestor. More generally, genealogists construct ancestral geographies charting mobility and immobility over centuries. Particular geographies are attached to narratives of identity, e.g., stories of settlement in America, transportation to Australia, or continuity with Ireland or England. Each of these histories has strong culturally defined associations, which participants in the pastime want to attach to. Runners share information about places to run for training or racing. "War stories" of runs chart the detail of geographical topographies. The meaning of the spaces passed through link to the narratives around the experience of running, be those of achievement or of pain.

All of these aspects speak of the socially constructed and negotiated meaning of place. Place is more than a set of coordinates. Indeed, to some extent, each pastime is defined by its relation to place and internally subdivided by space. Thus, urban explorers often specialise in particular types of space; runners on particular types of terrain and distance; genealogists to certain forms of historical connection. However, the concept of space between the pastimes is also widely diverse; what is relevant knowledge is different. Runners are interested in distances and gradients, because of these factors' impact on difficulty of running. Genealogists are interested in movement, but over lifetimes, rather than over an hour or two. It is not merely that the different pastimes may map places differently; the genres of representation of space have to be different. Runners do, indeed, create maps of their runs; urban explorers do not produce maps; rather, their focus is on capturing the aura of a space through photos and words. The flavour of both genealogy and urban exploration is historical, somehow locating the participant in relation to historical meaning, albeit very different types of history. Running focuses on personal progress against targets. Both runners and urban explorers might photograph their exploits, but while the runner's photo often expresses movement through low resolution images and jerky handheld video, the urban explorer seeks to produce high quality images and the genealogist seeks authentic, contemporary imagery (e.g., picture postcards or old photographs, as well as photographs of living relatives).

**Conclusion**

As Savolainen (2006) has suggested, space has often been seen within studies of information behaviour as a context within which information activities such as

seeking for information take place. Often, it is seen as a measurable space that constrains how information can be acquired, for example because of distance. Or characteristics of a space can act to make positive information behaviours, such as sharing, more likely. Many theories of information using the metaphor of space and movement to capture how information behaviours unfold.

However, this paper offers an alternative and fourth perspective to be distinguished from those Savolainen (2006) identifies. From the perspective of a constructivist view, meanings attached to place are socially constructed, actively produced in social practices, and the differing information behaviours woven through them. Place has complex, fluid, and contestable meanings. Not only do different social practices use different places differently, but they also construct notions of place differently. Which spaces are relevant, how they are used, how they are experienced physically and emotionally, and how they are defined informationally differ in ways inherently linked to the meanings and identities associated with those practices.

From this perspective focussing merely on the notion of space as a context in the sense of background or container for information behaviour would seem to make limited sense. Place is not a containing box, a frame for information behaviours; instead, it is an inherent aspect of the information that is being constructed. Rather than a given outside limit on activity, place is a focus of active negotiation of meaning. When we examine a new social practice and how it works informationally, we will want to explore how the meaning of place is defined in particular ways. Within the longstanding debate on context in information behaviour this approach reinforces the value of seeing context as itself socially constructed as Dourish (2004) suggests.

This conceptualisation of place as socially constructed partly through information behaviours suggests two lines of future research. Firstly, it is a prompt for empirical research to examine in detail different practices and how the information behaviours woven through them create a sense of place. Secondly, it will be possible to build from a number of such empirical studies a sense of how information behaviour contributes to more generalised experiences of places. This will contribute to theorisation of what attributes of a place make it a good place to seek and use information.

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