HUMANISTIC GEOGRAPHY

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Executive Summary

Humanistic geography studies not coordinates and relief but how people experience space, and why some places become their own while others frighten them. The field took shape in the 1970s, and its key concepts — place, sense of place, topophilia, lifeworld — have long been part of scholarly usage.

This report proposes a practical continuation of that tradition. People have always found places in nature where they feel better: anxiety recedes there and inspiration comes. Today such places are called places of power. The task of humanistic geography is to find such places, to open them carefully for recreation, and to create therapeutic landscapes on their model.

To describe places of power, the concept of hierotopy, which the Byzantinist Alexei Lidov introduced for churches, is transferred to nature: the landscape plays the role of architecture, the sun and clouds the role of candles, the sounds of water and birdsong the role of chant. Places of power are to be sought by a group of sensitive observers who record their impressions independently of one another. Agreement between the records is the sign of a place of power. The outcome of such work could be a map of natural places of power, a basis for a new, more humane tourism.

1. Humanistic Geography: Subject and Key Concepts

Humanistic geography is a field of geographical science that took shape in the 1970s as a response to spatial analysis. Spatial analysis described the world through quantitative data and mathematical models; humanistic geographers set against it the experience of the person for whom space and place are filled with meaning [Tuan 1979]. The programmatic works of the field appeared between 1974 and 1979 from Yi-Fu Tuan, Edward Relph, Anne Buttimer and David Seamon [Tuan 1974; Tuan 1976; Relph 1976; Buttimer 1976; Seamon 1979].

The central idea of the field can be put this way: geography is not only coordinates and relief but also the human experience of living in space. Tuan himself defined humanistic geography as the study of the human world through people's relations with nature, their behaviour in space, and their feelings and ideas about space and place [Tuan 1976].

In this report the object of humanistic geography is the system "human being — surrounding world", and its subject is how a person perceives, experiences and makes sense of space and place, and how he or she relates to them.

Humanistic geography studies:

1. The distinction between space and place. Space is abstract; place is space that a person has come to know and endowed with value: meaning, emotions, memories [Tuan 1977].
2. Sense of place: a person's attachment to home, city or landscape or, conversely, estrangement from them. This feeling and its opposite, "placelessness", were examined in detail by Relph [Relph 1976].
3. Topophilia and topophobia.
    - Topophilia is the emotional bond between a person and a place, love for particular places and landscapes. Tuan introduced this concept into geography [Tuan 1974].

- Topophobia is fear of and aversion to certain places, a sense of danger. In humanistic geography the term is associated with Relph [Seamon 1979], while Tuan himself wrote of "landscapes of fear".

4. The geographical lifeworld, the everyday experience of place [Buttimer 1976; Seamon 1979]. A child, an adult, a blind person, a tourist or a migrant see and feel the same city or street differently; Tuan, for example, examines separately how a child comes to know space [Tuan 1977], and Relph how an outsider sees a place [Relph 1976].
5. The geography of images and symbols: how places are reflected in literature, painting, film and personal memories.

2. Practical Significance: Places of Power and Therapeutic Landscapes

The main practical value of humanistic geography is that it teaches how to find and create an environment in which a person feels psychologically well and safe and feels at home. People need such an environment in everyday life, and it is especially in demand in tourism.

People have long noticed that in some places they feel better: ailments recede, inspiration comes, poems and paintings come more easily. Today such places are called places of power, and tourists and pilgrims travel there for this state.

The task of humanistic geography is to find places of power and to create recreation areas there for people worn out by the digital and technical environment. The number of visitors must be strictly limited, and the state of nature constantly monitored, so as to prevent its destruction.

The second direction is the creation of therapeutic landscapes: spaces that, on the model of natural places of power, benefit a person's mental and physical health. The concept of the therapeutic landscape was introduced by the medical geographer Wilbert Gesler, who studied why certain places are perceived as healing [Gesler 1992]. Environmental psychology studies a related question as recovery in nature [Kaplan 1995].

3. Natural Places of Power

Places of power are found in nature rather than in large cities and towns, and they are tied to the relief of the terrain.

1. First of all, mountains. A person instinctively strives to climb a mountain, ostensibly to look at himself, but in fact to undergo a temporary or lasting transformation, physical and spiritual. The height of the mountain plays no decisive role.
2. In second place come sacred groves and individual trees that stand out for their height, strength or unusual shape of branches. The Oak of Mamre, for example, was a place of worship: according to the fifth-century historian Sozomen, an annual festival with sacrifices was held there [Sozomen 1890]. Some solitary trees become symbols of a place in our own time, such as the Major Oak in Sherwood Forest or the Sycamore Gap tree by Hadrian's Wall.

   In Irish belief a solitary hawthorn or blackthorn bush was held to be the dwelling of fairies and a gateway to their world, and in fairyland time runs differently: a night there may equal twenty years [Evans-Wentz 1911]. Cutting down such a tree was thought to bring misfortune, and this

folk prohibition still holds: in 1999 at Latoon, County Clare, a "fairy bush" was preserved during the construction of a bypass [Deegan 1999].

A sacred thorn is associated with Glastonbury. According to legend, Glastonbury is the Isle of Avalon; in 1191 the monks of the local abbey announced that they had found the grave of King Arthur there [Gilchrist, Green 2015]. The thorn flowered twice a year, at Christmas and around Easter; in December 2010 vandals cut down the tree on Wearyall Hill [Hennessy 2010].

Trees received bloodless offerings: the Latvians, for example, brought milk, butter and cheese to a sacred linden [Vaitkevičienė 2011].

3. Rivers, streams and bodies of water in general — not all of them, but those marked by some natural distinctiveness.

   Seas and oceans are a special case: the sheer vastness of the water and the sound of the waves calm a person. Research on "blue spaces" confirms that views of water and the coast improve well-being and help restore strength [White et al. 2020].

In our view, swamps, thickets, windfalls, deserts, cities, towns and any places built up by people, except abandoned ones, are never sacred. If too many people begin to visit a place of power, it "fades" and merges with the surrounding landscape. Researchers of religious tourism describe this threat as the reduction of a sacred site to an ordinary attraction [Shackley 2001].

4. Hierotopy

In 2001 the art historian and Byzantinist Alexei Lidov proposed the concept of "hierotopy", from the Greek words hieros (sacred) and topos (place). Hierotopy is the creation of sacred spaces understood as a special form of creativity, and at the same time a field of historical research that studies concrete examples of this creativity [Lidov 2006].

Hierotopy treats a church or sanctuary not simply as a stone building but as a spatial image. Sacred space is created by a combination of many elements [Lidov 2006]:

- architecture and images (icons, frescoes);
- light (candles, sunbeams from the windows);
- sounds (chant, bell ringing);
- scents (incense, frankincense);
- the movement of people and rites (processions, the liturgy).

All these elements together form a special "living" environment, a hierotopic project that immerses a person in the experience of the sacred.

5. Natural Hierotopy

The concept of hierotopy can also be applied to natural spaces: they too contain all the elements listed.

1. Architecture is the landscape itself and its proportions.
2. Lighting is natural: the sun and the moon. Clouds belong here as well, forming natural pictures and making the light varied.

3. The sounds of nature act on people better than urban noise. A review of studies showed that natural sounds improve health and mood and reduce stress; the sound of water has the strongest effect on health, and birdsong on stress relief [Buxton et al. 2021].

   The hum of a beehive stays around 150 hertz, and the sound of a bee in flight at 180–260 hertz [Terenzi et al. 2020]. Cats purr at frequencies from 25 to 150 hertz, and these frequencies coincide with those used in medicine to treat fractures and wounds [von Muggenthaler 2001]. The presence of a pet softens a person's response to stress: in owners of cats and dogs blood pressure and pulse rise less, and they calm down faster [Allen et al. 2002].
4. Scents. In our view, the natural scents of grass, flowers and leaves make people breathe more deeply and induce a light trance state. Measurements confirm that in a forest a person's cortisol level, pulse and blood pressure fall, and the body shifts into a state of rest [Park et al. 2010].
5. Movement. The natural movement of wind and water is calming as long as it does not become dangerous (storm, hurricane). Psychologists call this "soft fascination": nature holds attention without effort and lets it rest [Kaplan 1995].

Thus hierotopy can be formed not only by churches built by people but also by natural elements. Different peoples have for centuries worshipped nature and drawn strength from it. Moreover, in our view, artificially created sacred places only approximately copy the effect of natural ones.

6. How to Find Places of Power

How can places of power be found — places of natural hierotopy, the sacred spaces of the surrounding world? The answer is needed in order to use natural landscapes for the recreation and recovery of people exhausted by the technogenic environment.

Only people can serve as an indicator of a place's sacredness, or more precisely, the similar impressions of a group of ten or more people with a hysteroid character accentuation [Lichko 1983] who have high empathy and a developed aesthetic and moral sense. These qualities can be measured objectively with psychological tests; empathy, for example, is measured by Davis's questionnaire [Davis 1983]. The link between hysteria and mediumship was noted by psychiatrists as early as the turn of the twentieth century: the young Jung described a medium he knew as a case of hysteria [Shamdasani 2015].

Such a group of specially trained people surveys the terrain and records its sensations:

1. Suddenly arising elevated feelings — sadness, happiness, peace — and any sensations that have no cause in the moment, or the complete disappearance of thoughts.
2. A wish to dissolve in nature and remain in it forever, a sense of flight or of emptiness.
3. An indistinct call of some higher powers.
4. A wish to create: to write poems, to paint a picture.
5. An acute sense of the distinctiveness of the place, its colours, sounds and landscape, up to a quickened heartbeat and breathing.
6. A wish to return to this place again and again.

Each participant records sensations in a personal diary without discussing them with others on site. After the expedition the records are compared, and the number of matching sensations decides whether the

place is a place of power. The method combines the ethnographic "go-along", which gives access to the perception of a place on the spot [Kusenbach 2003], with the principle of the Delphi method, in which experts give their judgements independently of one another [Dalkey, Helmer 1963].

Legends, folk tales and the ruins of ancient temples and structures can serve as a starting point for the search. In this way a map of the planet's natural places of power will gradually be compiled, and humanistic geography will gain a practical continuation in which people and the planet interact on both the scientific and the spiritual level.

7. Conclusion

When creating places of power and therapeutic landscapes, their location must be chosen with great care and the landscape carefully linked with local legends.

Tourist routes today are increasingly built not around a point on the map but around a place where a person feels well and wants to return. Tourism research shows that attachment to a place is one of the reasons travellers return and recommend it to others [Prayag, Ryan 2012]. The tourism industry should therefore move to a more humane approach in finding and creating new routes, and humanistic geography can help it do so.

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