

## Space, Place and Desistance from Drug Use

BEN HUNTER\*  
STEPHEN FARRALL\*

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### Abstract

As centres of human existence, places and spaces are vital for individuals' understanding of themselves and who they might become. We explore these aspects of existence through a longitudinal study of 43 current and former drug users. First, we identify the differences between those who have desisted from drug use and those who continued. These differences manifested themselves in the routines that frequently governed desisters' lives. Desisters had very little in the way of routines that served to structure their time and where they did these were more likely to be seen as a burden. Further, the places our respondents occupied served as indications of their own understandings of their self and their efforts to desist. Second, we investigate in detail one individual's desistance from drug use and the accompanying change in his existential geography. As Peter desisted his goals and aspirations changed, becoming less focused on avoiding drug use and directed to more positive desires. We discuss the implications of this work for desistance research.

### Key words

Existential geography; TimeSpace; desistance; drug use; existentialism

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\* Ben Hunter is Senior Lecturer in Criminology at University of Greenwich, UK, based in the Centre for Criminology. His research interests focus on desistance from crime, white-collar crime and the contributions of existential philosophy to understandings of offenders' lives. His recent publications include Hunter, B. 2015. *White-Collar Offenders and Desistance from Crime*. London: Routledge. University of Greenwich. School of Law. Old Royal Naval College. Park Row. London SE10 9LS. UK. [B.Hunter@gre.ac.uk](mailto:B.Hunter@gre.ac.uk)

\* Stephen Farrall works in the Centre for Criminological Research at the University of Sheffield. He has been studying why people stop offending since the very early 1990s and has run the project from which the data analysed herein was drawn since 1996. He has published three book on the experiences of this cohort of former probationers, the most recent of which is: Farrall, S., et al, 2014. *Criminal Careers in Transition: The Social Context of Desistance from Crime*. Oxford University Press. University of Sheffield. School of Law. Bartolome House. Winter Street. Sheffield. S3 7ND. United Kingdom. [S.Farrall@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:S.Farrall@sheffield.ac.uk)



**Resumen**

Como centros de la existencia humana, los lugares y los espacios son vitales para que los individuos se conozcan a sí mismos, y sepan en quién podrían convertirse. Estos aspectos de la existencia se analizan a través de un estudio longitudinal de 43 personas que consumen o han consumido drogas. En primer lugar, se identifican las diferencias entre los que han abandonado el consumo de drogas, y los que siguen consumiéndolas. Estas diferencias se manifestaron en las rutinas que a menudo regían en las vidas de los que habían abandonado el consumo. Los que seguían consumiendo tenían pocas rutinas que sirvieran para estructurar su tiempo, y si las tenían, se percibían como una carga. Además, los lugares que los encuestados ocupaban servían como indicaciones de su propia autocomprensión y sus esfuerzos para dejar el consumo. En segundo lugar, se investigó en detalle el abandono del consumo de droga de un individuo, y el cambio en su geografía existencial, que acompañó este proceso. Cuando Peter dejó el consumo, sus objetivos y aspiraciones cambiaron, y pasaron a estar menos centrados en impedir el consumo de drogas y dirigidos a deseos más positivos. Se analizan las implicaciones de este trabajo para la investigación sobre el abandono del consumo.

**Palabras clave**

Geografía existencial; TimeSpace; desistimiento; uso de drogas; existencialismo

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## 1. Introduction

Studies of desistance from crime have highlighted numerous factors that shape the process by which individuals move away from offending. Thus, for example, we are aware of the importance for desisters of employment (Pezzin 1995, Uggen and Kruttschnitt 1998), forming romantic partnerships (e.g. Warr 1988, Horney *et al.* 1995, Laub *et al.* 1998) and building 'narratives' that support their attempts to leave crime behind (Maruna 2001, Maruna and Roy 2007, Vaughan 2007, Harris 2011, King 2013). However, to date, few studies have considered the role of space and place<sup>1</sup> in efforts to desist from crime. Our aim is to explore the physical places and spaces that desisters inhabit, to identify how desistance impacts upon individuals' everyday activities, including the venues in which these take place. We contend that desistance is not just about no longer offending, it can also be about adopting a different set of routines which take individuals to very different places to when they used to offend. Such routines start to tell both the desister and those who know his or her past something different about who they are now – and this can inform ideas about who they can become in the future too.

In what follows we study the role space and place in the desistance process – specifically, desistance from drug use – in two ways. First, we consider a group of current and former drug users, comparing where they spend their time and what they do when they are in those particular places. We note that not only do those who are still offending frequently spend their time in different ways to those who have desisted from crime, when they *do* engage in the same activities as desisters, they appear to do so far more grudgingly. Second we draw upon existentially informed ideas of the future, tied up with the concept of the 'life project' (Craib 1976, Hayim 1996) to understand changes in the existential landscape of Peter, a former heroin user. We use the example of Peter to explore how changes in offending behaviour relate to perceptions of the significant spaces in which people enact their lives. The changes that took place in Peter's existential landscape as he desisted from drug use were partly a result of his efforts to desist and based upon his future project as a non-drug user but also a result of events over which he had little (or no) control. We outline how Peter's recognition of and relationship with the space in which he spent his time changed as he gradually progressed out of his drug use. The meaning that particular places had for Peter changed as his future project developed from a focus on simply 'being' an ex-drug user to encapsulate more concrete plans for his future. These also show an acute awareness on Peter's part of other places – or, more accurately, the people in these places – and the threat they represented to his goals.

Our contribution is therefore to elucidate an understanding of desistance from drug use with an existentially informed perspective on the role of places and time in people's lives. This approach provides a useful way of thinking about the process of desistance from crime and the manner in which the routines people have impact on their offending by taking them to different places at different times and the impact of this on their own understanding of themselves. We start, however, with a consideration of the role that places can have as contributing to an understanding of human existence. We then relate the use of space to the life project, noting that the meaning attributed to places is in part a function of who we wish to be.

## 2. Space and crime

Much of the criminal careers research in the UK and the USA has been strongly offender-centred and displayed less concern with any connection between the individual career and the local context in which it unfolds. For example, although all

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<sup>1</sup> 'Space' is used here to refer to physical locations (such as buildings, parks, roads and so on). We use 'place' to identify distinctive types of spaces in and through which individuals and groups derive meaning. Spaces are therefore physical constructs, whilst places are arenas in which people lives are lived out and through which they derive a sense of belonging (or exclusion).

of the sample members of the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development lived in the same area when recruited into the study, analyses have not considered changes in environment over time. Using data from the US, Laub and Sampson (2003, also Sampson and Laub 1994, Laub *et al.* 1998) illuminated the role of familial and community contexts and their relationship to offending. Amongst their conclusions was the observation that poverty impacts upon the ability of families to exert informal social control, a lack of which is associated with delinquency (Sampson and Laub 1994). Rutter and Giller (1983, p. 185) and Goldson and Jamieson (2002) draw similar conclusions i.e. that communities that are disadvantaged make good parenting difficult to achieve.

Nevertheless, few have studied the relationship between geographical communities and *adult* involvement in crime. Hobbs' (1988) study of East-End (of London) entrepreneurs and the values held by many local residents demonstrated the important role played by the local milieu in shaping criminal careers. In the USA, MacLeod (1995) studied two gangs growing up in 'Clarendon Heights' and charted their feelings about their own criminal and delinquent behaviour and the neighbourhoods in which they lived. MacLeod argued that individuals' aspirations were likely to be mediated by their environment and the expectations this placed upon them. Expectations of success in endeavours were far more likely when examples of success by others were common (MacLeod 1995, p. 15). MacLeod's work suggests that as some opportunities are eroded (in this case, employment and opportunities to 'make it'), so behaviours are altered, and that this frequently has implications for some people's involvement in crime (Black 2009).

In a similar vein, the economic changes (e.g. increased unemployment and income inequality) that have characterised the last quarter of the twentieth century resulted in large social changes (see Hagan 1997, p. 289, Farrall *et al.* 2010). For example, a significant proportion of young people leaving school since the 1980s will either expect *not* to work, will experience economic instability or may become accustomed to periodic unemployment. Wilson argues that processes like these lead to a lack of employment opportunities and subsequently a weaker attachment to the labour force, increasing the likelihood that money will be sought through illicit activities (Wilson 1991, p. 10).

### 3. TimeSpace

The above notwithstanding, the paucity of consideration given to places in the desistance process encourages us to draw upon wider considerations of how places shape and are shaped by individual lives. To that end we draw on insights from contemporary geographers' understandings of how lives unfold along temporal and spatial dimensions and how these intersect with key existentialist tenets. The work we draw upon most heavily relates to time and space in the contemporary period. For example, May and Thrift (2001, p. 1-2) argue for the necessity of transcending the dichotomy between 'time' and 'space'. Accordingly, they explore ways in which a sense of time is shaped by a series of timetables and rhythms (May and Thrift 2001, p. 3-4). For example, an individual day has a rhythm of its own and, for many, will contain certain events that take place at approximately the same time each day (getting up; getting ready; travelling to work; the working day, punctuated by meal breaks; travelling home and the evening). Days are embedded in weeks, which in turn have rhythms (e.g. working Monday to Friday, but not at the weekend). For many, months too have their own rhythms, with certain events taking place at the end of the month (pay day, reports to line managers) or at set points during the month (such as 'signing on' if not working). Yearly rhythms include holidays clustered around school vacations and major religious or cultural festivals. These temporal rhythms also have a spatial dimension: home, work and school take us to different places at different times, and even those working from home often work in a specific room. Similarly, festivals and religious events may invite travel to specific places in order to be there for specific times.

Further, May and Thrift see the distinction between time and space as artificial one since "time is irrecoverably bound up with the spatial constitutions of society" (May and Thrift 2001, p. 3). Their 'TimeSpace' project seeks to fuse time and space without prioritising one over the other. An example of this are the ways different social institutions act to produce socially-based disciplines of time (May and Thrift 2001, p. 18). As Ingold notes "... in social life, there is not just one rhythmic cycle, but a complex interweaving of very many concurrent cycles" (Ingold 1993, p. 160, see also Buttimer 1976, p. 289). In short, time is not one-dimensional. Individuals may experience daily cycles of TimeSpace trajectories which revolve around childcare-school-work-school-home-housework-childcare emplacements. Formal laws, social conventions and economic necessities push people into such trajectories by requiring them to send their children to school and to ensure that they are cared for after school, to attend work, and so on. Ingold (1993) refers to this as a "taskscape" - an array of related activities which are played out over time in different locales, and which implies interactivity, rather than just activity. As such, where someone is and when, and what they are doing whilst there, is partially determined by all sorts of factors, which, together, create 'bundles' of temporalised and spatialised activities. Such bundling reflects the interaction of one individual's priorities, the priorities and requirements of the institutions they are engaged with and the *longue durée* influences of 'historical' time (see Pierson 2004).

Hence routine social activities give certain places meanings that in turn help to shape a sense of individuals' identity. In this way certain places become 'symbolic landscapes' (Eyles 1989, p. 112), which exhibit 'layers' of lived space (Buttimer 1976), and hence have layers of meanings too. As Harvey puts it, "space only takes on meaning in terms of significant relationships" (Harvey 1974, p. 34).

Eyles argues that "... through our actions in everyday life we build up, maintain and reconstruct the very definitions, roles and motivations that shape our actions", adding that these allow us all to "... derive a sense of self, of identity, as living a real and meaningful biography" (Eyles 1989, p. 103). Goffman (1959, p. 2) also noted that individuals' actions and locations are viewed by others as symptomatic of their character. The settings in which we are seen therefore provide clues about our status (Goffman 1959).

#### 4. Existential geographies

As the above indicates, a number of writers have explored the interconnections between individual meaning and the way space is defined and used by social actors. This exploration of what might be termed 'existential geography' is concerned with the meaning individuals attribute to places and how human experience and awareness of place contributes to an understanding of individual lives (Seamon and Sowers 2009). For Samuels (1978) 'existential space' is the landscape of our sense of who we are and the web of different places from which we derive meaning. Key to understanding existential geography is that existential space does not map to physical space i.e. the geographical properties of a locale (Buttimer 1976). The existential space relating to one's hometown cannot be understood by locating that town on a map for example, or even by driving through it. Instead 'hometown' as a centre of meaning is both smaller and bigger than its geographical dimensions. It is smaller in that in one's day-to-day routine only a small portion of the hometown is likely to be used e.g. the same few streets and shops, the same route to and from work. Simultaneously it is bigger because an awareness of what it is like to be in one's home town may exist for the individual beyond the officially prescribed town limits. For example, if one leaves the town and then returns it is through certain landmarks on the journey back that one may come to understand that they are 'home'.

Also of importance for our existential geography is the 'natural place' we hold firmly to:

"This natural place is set within a "membered spatial surrounding," a series of places which fuse to form meaningful regions, each with its own appropriate structure and orientation to other regions. Each person is surrounded by concentric "layers" of lived space, from room to home, neighbourhood, city, region, and nation." (Buttimer 1976, p. 284)

Eyles (1989) concurs with the importance of being attached to a particular place to ground our sense of who we are and our identity. The objects and structures (for example, a bus stop) or organisations (for example a parade of local shops) present in particular locations also help to constitute particular places for each individual, based upon the meaning they hold (Ingold 1993, p. 167).

Despite the importance of places and the role they play in our lives however, we are often unthinking in how we come to be in them and how we use them. This habitual aspect of place and the role it plays in our lives is a defining characteristic of what Seamon terms our lifeworld: "...the taken-for-granted pattern and context of everyday life, by which the person routinely conducts his or her day-to-day existence..." (Seamon 1980, p. 149, see also Seamon and Sowers 2009). Much is taken for granted because without this the social actor would be paralysed by the need to constantly make and remake decisions over their environment and how to act within it. Only in times of deep reflection might we become aware of our lifeworld as the pattern and routines of our existence become examined and potentially subject to alteration (Buttimer 1976). Through an understanding of which spaces have meaning and their relationship with one another each person holds an awareness of their existential landscape; a geography that identifies the relationship between the various realms within which they exist (e.g. home life, work life, social life).

In thinking about the world of the existential subject then, our attention is drawn not to the physical features of their environment and the geographical spaces they make up (Buttimer 1976). Instead we are interested in the spaces individuals move into and out of and what they do while in them. From an existential perspective the way in which individuals behave in space and assign meaning to places are important for identifying how they understand themselves (Samuels 1978, Hayim 1996, p. 56-57). From the places we inhabit we derive something about who we are and the relevance of that place to our personal biography both in the past, the present and the future (Tuan 1975). The meaning we give to particular spaces is built up as we move within them and this place-meaning is part of the way particular places are used.

This distinction between physical and existential space is necessary as it serves as a reminder that to understand change in individuals we need to understand how they construct meaning in the places they inhabit, how that meaning can change and how such change relates to shifts in patterns of behaviour. The meaning of the various places and spaces we inhabit can change even when there is no physical shift in the places we use and the spaces we inhabit. While physical geography may change slowly, an individual's existential geography is likely to be constantly being reworked.

## 5. The future

Part of this reworking is a consequence of the existential subject living their life 'into the future.' It is in this focus on the future that existential considerations of space and place begin to intersect more centrally with core existential concerns. As with many other existential concerns, the future as an object of focus has been considered by those who wish to develop an existentially informed sociology (for example Kotarba 1984, Craib 1976 and Hayim 1996). This reflects long established emphasis on the future in philosophical writings. Nietzsche (1968, 2004), Sartre

(1958) and Heidegger (1962) for example were all at pains to emphasise that lives are lived into the future and also that our regard for who we can be and who we want to be has a bearing both on our present and how we interpret our past.

Hayim, in an attempt to rectify a perceived overly-deterministic sociology elucidates an existential perspective on social situations and the action that takes place within them (Hayim 1996, p. 56-57). Hayim argues that social environments – including specific spaces and places – have no intrinsic meaning of their own (Hayim 1996, p. 56-57). Instead they await the meaning placed upon them by the social actor in accordance with their life project: the panoply of aspirations, drives and hopes specific to each individual see (e.g. Sartre 1958, p. 147, Craib 1976, p. 28-30, Hayim 1996, p. 74). A park, for example, exists independently of any one individual. One person may see the open spaces and natural scenery as an ideal place to facilitate the spending of time with their family. Another person, may see a prime development opportunity if the land can be bought and built on, while yet another may simply view it as a convenient shortcut on the way to work. In each case the project of the individual construes the space in a different way. The same environment can therefore be either be ally or adversary depending on what we wish to achieve (Sartre 1958, p. 504). But of course, projects can change and in this way so do particular environments and situations that occur with respect to them.

The foregoing demonstrates that to understand individual lives it is important to appreciate how people exist within and ‘use’ the places that are personal to them. As we exist within places we try to shape them to our own ends, according to our own definition of self and our own future project (Eyles 1989). In this way then the meaning that places have can be used by people to express something of who they are. Equally, by understanding something about how a person uses a place we understand something about them (Buttimer 1980). Individuals are not passive actors within spaces. They take steps to organise their space in accordance with their goals (Buttimer 1976). However, few places are ours to do with exactly as we wish. Even our home environment is unlikely to be one we are completely in control of (Buttimer 1976). For example if we rent accommodation we cannot simply make any home improvements we like according to our fancy. Even if we own the place we identify as home the physical boundaries of our property place a constraint on what can be achieved.

It is the changing meaning of space and place that we wish to focus on here, and in particular on how changes in personalised existential geographies intertwine with efforts to desist from crime. Desistance from crime is frequently accompanied by shifts in offenders’ outlook, accompanied by a reorientation of priorities and rewriting of personal narratives (e.g. Maruna 2001, Giordano *et al.* 2002, Laub and Sampson 2003, Farrall and Calverley 2006). The relationship between desistance and the spaces and places in which offenders spend their time is not well understood however. Nevertheless, part of the commitment to the sort of future concomitant with efforts to desist from crime frequently involves spending less time with ‘negative influences’ and the places such influences inhabit (e.g. Scott 2004, Flynn 2010). The ‘character’ of places and the meanings they impute upon those who spend time in them has also been recognised as impacting on attempts to desist (Goffman 1967, Meisenhelder 1977, 1982). For those trying to demonstrate that they have changed there are places they can spend their time that support this ‘message’ e.g. churches, community centres, drug and alcohol treatment clinics (Meisenhelder 1977). Equally however, there are places that send the opposite message; that the offender has yet to change their ways. Bars and pool halls are examples of such dens of iniquity (Meisenhelder 1977). Further, the majority of places may have neither intrinsically positive or negative attributions. Walking through a park suggests neither delinquent nor conformist leanings.<sup>2</sup> What is key in

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<sup>2</sup> Although what one does as one walks and any company they keep may of course do so.

this is not simply the place itself, but its character, which is partly determined by its other inhabitants. Both Meisenhelder (1977) and Goffman (1963) hint that the places an individual routinely inhabits communicate some element of 'who' they are and 'what' they do. Time spent in snooker halls or 'dodgy' bars suggests a routine engagement with others who may be engaged in offending. Alternatively, spending time at work, engaged in childcare duties, or with 'benevolent' bodies such as churches or civic groups can help to create at least the image of a reformed or reforming character.

These diverse but interconnected bodies of literature provide a useful framework for thinking about the role of time, space and place in the desistance process. This encourages us to investigate whether those who have desisted from crime spend their time in different places/doing different things than those who are offending.

## 6. Method

The data we present here were gathered as part of a longitudinal study into desistance from crime (the methodology for the study is reported on in more detail in Farrall 2002, Farrall and Calverley 2006, Farrall *et al.* 2014). In 1997, 199 offenders, aged between 17 and 35 were recruited while they were serving a probation order and, over the following two years, were each interviewed between one and three times (Farrall 2002). Two attempts were made to follow up this sample: in 2003/2004 (Farrall and Calverley 2006) and 2010-2013 (Farrall *et al.* 2014). Each participant was therefore interviewed between one and five times. The semi-structured interviews asked participants about their lives, their offending, their efforts to desist and (at second and subsequent interviews) how they had changed since they had joined the study. The data we report below are largely, though not exclusively, drawn from the most recent sweep of interviews and focus on those members of the sample who we identified as drug users at the time of the conviction that led to them joining the project.<sup>3</sup> This subset of the main sample consisted of 43 respondents. This qualitative longitudinal approach allowed us to develop a rich and detailed account of the members of the sample, covering 15 years of their lives. See Farrall *et al.* 2014 and Farrall *et al.* 2015 for more details of the methodology.

One of the core concerns of the wider project was to determine to what extent sample members had indeed desisted from crime. While such assessments are always fraught with difficulty (see for example Laub and Sampson 2001, Kazemian 2007, Farrall *et al.* 2014), identifying who was no longer offending was therefore important. We identified sample members as desisting if they had gone more than two years without offending,<sup>4</sup> as measured by both their self-report and official data on convictions. In the analysis that follows we identify our respondents as desisters or persisters based on this distinction. 24 of the drug offenders (including 7 women) had desisted with 19 (including 3 women) identified as still offending.

## 7. Investigating TimeSpace routines

As part of the interviews, and to explore the places our respondents inhabited we asked them to recount their activities on two recent days. Typically these days were a Wednesday and Saturday but where respondents worked Saturdays they were asked to recount a non-working day instead.<sup>5</sup> We probed where they were, who they were with, who else was there and what they were doing as interviewees reconstructed these days for us. Sample members were asked to recount their day from 6am (or the time they got up, if earlier) to 6am the following day.

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<sup>3</sup> This group of offenders consists of those whose offending consisted of regular drug use or was enacted to support a drug addiction (see Farrall *et al.* 2014, chapter 4).

<sup>4</sup> For our purposes use of cannabis did not constitute offending, although use of other drugs did.

<sup>5</sup> These questions were not asked of those in prison.

With this approach we were heavily influenced by work on time-space budgets (e.g. Belli *et al.* 2009, Wikström *et al.* 2011), which as a general method has been proven to be reliable (Phipps and Vernon 2009, p. 114-115). Wikström *et al.* (2011), who used time-space budgets with the young adults in the Peterborough Study of Adolescent Development (PADS), recommend temporal units of one hour and suggest that asking about the past four days is as valid as asking about the previous week (Wikström *et al.* 2011, p. 120-121). Their research led them to identify which social groupings and environments are most likely to result in adolescent criminal activity.

In short, we followed what Seamon (1980, p. 151) outlined as one of the ways to collate data in order to develop a phenomenological understanding of time/space usage. Our aim was to generate concrete descriptions of space, time and activities (and co-actors) in order to explore the meanings of space and place for offenders and ex-offenders. The responses elicited generated exactly the sort of rich accounts of 'now' required for TimeSpace analyses (May and Thrift 2001, p. 37).

## 8. The TimeSpace routines of persistence and desistance

In asking our participants about how they spent their time, several themes emerged. We explore here the role of family and work commitments that created routines for them and the nature of the appointments our respondents had. Desisters and persisters frequently reported not only differences in the way their days were structured but also their attitude to the commitments they did have. Such differences – with persisters not only less likely to report having routines but also to speak less positively about routines they *did* have – led us to explore the processes involved in desistance to identify whether such desistance has a rhythm of its own.

### 8.1. Family time

With regards to family, many of the desisters we spoke to recounted a family routine revolving around getting up in the morning, getting children ready for school and (often) heading off to work themselves. However, few of the persisters referred to any such routine. Megan, (an ex-injecting drug user) was typical of many working mothers:

"If it was like a normal day I'd be getting the kids ready for school, take them to breakfast club, go to work, um. [Int: What time do you start work?] 8am. Do a load of typing, go out for my cig at 10am, go for lunch, come back, then I get the kids normally about 3 – about 5 to 3 I leave to get them from school, um, come home, probably go on a computer for about half an hour, recently I've started doing typing at home so a lot of the time I'll be on the computer for about 3 hours, er, eat my dinner, husband cooks it, sort the kids out for bed, maybe do some more typing...".

Desisters appeared to consciously create routines for themselves and others – Megan, for example can cite the precise time of some activities. Similarly, Jimmy's working day was seemingly laid out for him, with specific times for work and for relaxing:

My sleeping pattern's a bit, yeah, at the moment. So yeah probably got up at half 5 [in the morning], I probably had coffee, fags, breakfast, TV, a bit of quiet, what I call quiet time, bit of prayer, bit of reading. You know just to quieten myself down, prepare for the day if you like...I leave here at half 8 [to go to work]...Go to work, you know my kind of routine at work consists of probably sorting out paperwork from yesterday, you know notes about clients, putting it on the system. And then you know, start seeing clients, deal with phone calls, deal with whatever comes up. Lunch time I go off to the cafe, cause some people stay in the building, I want to get the fuck out, to be honest, I go off, sometimes on my own, sometimes with a colleague, it depends. Go off, and then come back at half 1, afternoons are normally fucking mad, you know normally the clients are awake...it's a drug agency, its frontline-ish. Yeah, proper fucking mental stuff. You know its, yeah they're all

coming in to get their scripts, key working sessions, dealing with police enquiries, probation enquiries, fucking hell you name it. Yeah so that can be busy until about 5 o'clock...Then I went and met my brother, spent a bit of time just chatting about things in general. And then, what did I do then, I went and met another friend. Came home. [Int: What time, roughly?] Oh I came home about 7, half 7...Yeah so that was that. Came home, had something to eat, chilled out.

Persisters were often less than positive about family roles. Don, for example, gave us the impression that he did all he could to sneak out of helping with the family chores:

"If [son] wakes up really early, so he'll probably wake up about half past eight, I'll put TV on for him, put cartoons on, and he'll probably wake me up about half nine, ten. I'll get up, make him some cornflakes or some toast and I'll just get back into bed me, while he's watching telly and that. Then I'll probably get up about, again, about twelve o'clock."

The chief difference between desisters and persisters therefore was not so much that desisters were more likely to be involved in family activities such as providing childcare. It was their *attitude* to such activities – i.e. as a meaningful and worthwhile use of their time – that differed.

### 8.2. Employment and other appointments

For many desisters, working life and its concomitant responsibilities provided a further set of time and space structures. Such routines tended also to disrupt the times when people could socialise, making the lives of desisters more 'home-centred'. For example, Patrick outlined his daily routine:

"[Get up about] 8 o'clock, don't rush up. 8 o'clock, at work by 9, stay at work till 6, go in the gym at half 6, down there for about 2 hours and then a couple of beers and home, grilled fish, video, asleep about 2 in the morning."

This was a routine that Patrick followed Monday to Friday. Terry's working week was similarly 'fixed':

"Get up at, get up about quarter to eight, have some breakfast. Me and my wife usually say a little prayer together, pray for the day, pray for like protection and blessing over the day and that. [partner] goes to work at about quarter to nine, I'm starting to go to work at quarter to nine now, so I drop her off at half eight and then I go to work at quarter to nine. Come home from work at four o'clock, have our tea... similar sort of thing each day. Have our tea, and then go and sit in back garden, chill out, maybe go to [supermarket] shopping, you know on different days we do that. We go to a church, a group, part of church, on a Tuesday night. On a Wednesday night usually it's, we sit and you know, we'll sit and watch a film or we'll see something on telly that we want to watch. We like Without A Trace, [partner] likes Without A Trace and I do, we watch that on Hallmark. I watch sport every now and again, [partner] watches cooking programmes, and we have a bit of a routine like that. But its similar, you know, go to work, come home, spend the night together, sometimes its a group, sometimes [partner] will go and have a coffee with one of her friends, sometimes I'll go have a coffee with one of my friends. Friday night is my night, where I watch boxing."

For Markey (a desister) 'appointments' extended from work and childcare to 'appointments' with televised sporting events:

"So about quarter past four, come home [from work], relax for a minute, make something to eat for me and [son]. And then I'd more than likely do a Cocaine Anonymous meeting, Wednesday night. . . That will take me to 9pm. And then I'd just come home. Come home, relax for an hour, watch telly, I might have recorded something, because the joys of recovery have given me a Sky HD box. Or if the footie - if it's a football or Champions League season I'm not going anywhere, I'm staying here."

Desisters' daily routines were therefore punctuated with places they needed to be at a certain time, and by and large were appointments that they willingly accepted.

For persisters, there appeared to be little fixed routine, however. Douglas described his days:

“...my days are, I get up, I take [dog] out, I tidy up, take [dog] out, go down the police station, sign bail, come back, sometimes my mate comes up, just play playstation and stuff. Bit bored now, it’s like it’s...[trails off]”

In addition, where there was structure to the lifestyles of persisters, this was often constituted by mandated appointments, as both Edward and Shawn outlined:

Int: So you went to your mate’s on Sunday, were you there all day and all night?

Edward: Yes.

Int: Oh right. And you were just drinking and what did you do this morning then?

Edward: Well I came home, had some food. And I went around and scored [heroin].

And then I had to go to probation. By the time I got back you’ve come.

Shawn: Wednesday I have to go to the Job Centre every week. No, first of all I’ll go to the chemist straight away [to get methadone script].

Int: So you get up, go to the chemist.

Shawn: Then if I have got any appointments in [...], probation once a week on a Wednesday. Not much else I really do on a Wednesday. Look at these four walls basically.

So whilst desisters appeared to have lives structured by various routines, persisters showed no such sense of needing to be anywhere at any particular time. Employment therefore provided desisters with a regular appointment that they were obliged to keep. Differences between desisters and persisters were also present when the types of appointments they had were considered: as the above indicate desisters’ appointments were frequently orientated towards getting children to school and/or themselves to work. Meanwhile, persisters’ appointments tended to be obligations that were forced upon them as conditions of criminal convictions (e.g. fortnightly meetings with probation officers) or with those who were supportive of their continued offending (e.g. meeting drug dealers in order to buy drugs).

### *8.3. A TimeSpace rhythm for desisting from drug use*

We noted above that individual days (and indeed weeks and months) frequently consist of a rhythm constituted in the way various activities relate to one another (May and Thrift 2001). Consequently, we looked in detail at the accounts of those in our sample who were attempting to desist from drug use in an attempt to identify if such a rhythm was present in their lives. Let us start with Steve, who was put on probation for theft in 1997, and was trying to overcome long-term heroin addiction. Steve’s timespace routine for the previous Wednesday went as follows: Steve got up an hour earlier than usual, as he had to attend a probation appointment at 9am. After his hour-long appointment, Steve returned home for a cup of tea, before heading off to another appointment at a drugs rehabilitation agency, a 45 minute walk from his home. Steve reported that “we all sit in a room and tell each other why and what we’ve done in our past, why we’re ashamed of it, why we’re on drugs, what would we do to get off the drugs, which you can learn off other people who’ve got off it, because some people go in that room who are clean”. He arrived back home at 2.30pm, and then went out again to decorate a family member’s flat rather than sitting at home as he normally would. He returned home that evening at 8pm, made something to eat and watched TV until he went to bed at 1am. For Steve, home is where he relaxes, even if he does describe his house as “a dump” with a serious damp problem. Steve’s day is spent criss-

crossing the local area (but rarely leaving it) between the probation office, the drugs agency, benefits agency and the job centre. At each of these he must 'present' himself for inspection on a regular basis, account for his actions and be questioned about various aspects of his life. These do not sound like scenarios in which he is much valued or much rewarded. Note above his description of his drugs agency appointment. For much of his day Steve is being reminded of his "failure" – as a man (who has spent much of his life using heroin), as a father (his children had been removed from his care), and as a citizen (through the revolving door of prison, and living in substandard, rented accommodation in an impoverished part of his city), and asked to talk about why he was "ashamed" of using drugs. Little in his time-space routines encourages or enables him to break out of the area he lives in or the lifestyle he has led, and not if it reinforced a sense of failure.

Steve's example illustrates that the areas in which our respondents lived were intimately connected with their own understanding of themselves and their efforts to leave drug use behind them. Edward reflected on the ways in which his engagement with probation and drugs workers was hindered by the distance between the two offices:

"I haven't had a chance to start my [methadone] script. Because I have to walk to [a different area of the city, approximately three miles away], and that's a long walk. It's fine if I have to walk to probation. But that's twice the distance. So I don't really feel like walking all the way down there. And now I've got to walk all the way back".

Douglas, who had been using heroin for several years, reported that he felt "trapped" in the area of the city in which he lived (and where he had been living for most of his life). In part this was the result of one of his drugs workers refusing to give him sufficient drugs for him to go away from the area for the weekend:

"It's like I feel trapped here sometimes, cause like I need that methadone and [drugs worker] knows that, so like if he won't give me to take away, I'm stuck here, so I can't go. Whereas if I didn't bother methadone and stuff like that, which would mean I use drugs and stuff, and then when I come back, cause I had a lot of shit from it, so I feel a bit trapped sometimes".

For others, just being in the place where they had been so heavily involved in offending felt confining, and so they decided to leave that locale completely. Eugene is someone we identified as a desister:

"...just everything associated there for me, drugs, everything, people I knew, everywhere I looked, [...] especially, where I look, even friends that have got the – that don't do drugs, they live in that area where I used to constantly sell my stuff from shoplifting, score, yeah, it was like a – you know *The Prisoner* – the series? [Int: TV programme?] With the big ball thing, like that little island, that's what [...] reminds me of. I don't know why but it just did."

Others reported similar feelings to those mentioned by Eugene, and which again resulted in them permanently leaving the area. Patrick reflected on what he noticed as he started to move away from the recreational drug taking network he had been heavily involved in:

"I only just started to notice it, it's like, "where's everyone gone?" And I'm left with normal straight people and it's like, alright. And so I'm just slowly moving into other circles. It's weird, one minute everyone's there, and literally, you know, they're all like, 'see you!' And they've been plotting and planning this exodus to do drugs. I just don't see it anymore. You know I'll see, what'll happen is I'll see a drug dealer walk into a bar or somewhere, or I'll see somebody go out to a car somewhere and the next thing you know everyone's gone. And I just, you know, it's not my party so I'm not following them. I just go off and do something else. It's weird. I'm just starting to get friends that aren't in that scene."

For some people who had left crime behind certain places became 'contaminated' or 'no go' places. Susanne, who had not used drugs for 10 months at the time of her

2010 interview was in self-imposed exile from places where former associates gathered:

"I stay away from them all, to be honest, because I have to. There's a lot of people that I even went to school with, and I have to stay away from them. And I don't like doing it, but I also know that they're like that, 'oh come on'. And I know they would, they wouldn't think, 'oh I went to school with her, and I'm glad she's doing well ...' They'd be like, 'oh come on lets go and score'. And they would, know they would. So it's a bit shitty, isn't it? But that's how it is, that's how it's got to be at the minute."

Nevertheless, avoiding the places frequented by her former drug-using associates, meant that Susanne also had to stay away from the place where she grew up - the one period of her life when she was not using heroin:

"Where we used to live there, at [...] Street, it's absolutely, its heaving [with drugs] up there. [Right]. Yeah, up there yeah. In the park and ... I totally stay away from there, I don't go near it anymore. Which I miss because I lived there for so long with my mum".

Terry reported that he tried to stay away from clubs as seeing people involved in drug use made him feel uncomfortable:

"You know, clubs what remind of my past and you know, pubs where you see ... Nowadays you can go to just a normal pub and you see people going to the toilet all the time and they're going in there to snort coke. It's just a massive thing now and it's everywhere. It's everywhere, you know, and it just makes me feel really uncomfortable. I don't like to put myself in that situation 'cause I can feel it, and it makes me feel really uncomfortable. [Int: Uncomfortable in terms of?] Well in terms of ... It's just what I used to do, and I feel uncomfortable. And I see them going backwards and forwards and thinking "wow man, that's what I ...". You know, even though I'm far away from that person, I still can get like a bit of a flashback of what it used to be like. And they're not on my level. If I go into a pub I'm okay for the first hour, but as soon as I see people tilting, as soon as I see people going a bit drunk and a bit weird they're not on my level anymore and I don't, I want to be out of there, if you know what I mean?"

Such feelings were not just abstract worries about 'slipping back' into drug use or a growing squeamishness about drugs. Several ex-users wanted to avoid the people they used to hang around with for fear of others (even those who did not know about their pasts) assuming the worst about them, which could damage not only their own reputation, but that of their children:

Owen: I don't really try and avoid them [former-friends he used drugs with], it's just I feel a bit ashamed. Cause of where I live now, if I bumped into someone who was on drugs - and you can always tell someone who's on drugs - and if I was stood talking to them, and people round here saw me talking to them, they'd think, "why's he talking to him?" And it just, I just could do without people thinking that sort of thing about me, when I've got my little lass going to school round here. So I just try and keep away from them if I can.

For Tyler, who was interviewed whilst on license, it was clear that not being able to avoid some people was part and parcel of his struggle away from addiction:

"I don't see nobody. When I go into...to go to probation, I might see the odd guy that I used to have drugs with. I just let on to him and then just walk away. I just do what I've got to do and get on the bus out of there. I just do, see probation, get on the bus and straight out of the there, don't hang around."

Certainly it appeared that the drugs and criminal justice services operated (along with other mechanisms, such as the housing market) to 'containerise' drug users into specific parts of cities, within which they lived out most of their daily lives.

As the above indicates, both desisters and those trying to desist were keenly aware of the 'character' of certain places and the people in those places and took steps to avoid them because of the connotations of associating with such people. They were

also aware of the more positive connotations associated with some locales though. Often this awareness was framed in terms of the 'journey' away from crime. Nick is someone who we identified as a persister, although his last use of heroin was eight months prior to his most recent interview (2010) and we therefore felt he was making progress in his attempts to desist from drug use. As part of this progress Nick reflected on being in 'normal' places, as opposed to those sorts of places he used to hang around in:

"Like last year, we went swimming every other Saturday, I went swimming and so did the kids, it was the first time the kids had been swimming. So we go swimming, McDonalds, just normal family stuff but sometimes when I am out and stuff and I am there with my kids and stuff I think back, you know, years, "I am in a McDonalds and I used to be a smackhead", fucking all sorts. And now I am with normal people doing normal stuff what normal people do, but it freaks me out a little bit, you know, because of what I have been like in the past".

For Nick, the "normal" places he now spends his time are an indication to him of his progress away from offending. But his awareness of this character of places demonstrates the shift in the relationship with particular places that is concomitant with desistance. This is one of the themes we now explore in our consideration of Peter.

## 9. The existential geography of desistance

The above accounts by our respondents speak to desisters and persisters spending time, not necessarily in different ways, but in different places. Part of desisting for many members of our sample was therefore about spending time in very different places to those they had while offending. We turn now to our consideration of one of the members of our sample to illustrate how, contrary to this, desistance from crime can occur through a change in an individual's 'existential' geography without any shift in the physical landscape of their lives.

Peter was interviewed four times in total: twice in 1998 and once each in 2003 and 2010. When he was recruited in to the study Peter had previous convictions for violence, burglary and handling stolen goods and was serving a 12 month probation order for burglary after he and a friend tried to break into a factory. At the time of his most recent interview Peter was living in what had been his Grandmother's flat, taking over the rent after she had passed away. Peter had been a persistent user of heroin, first starting in 1995. His heroin use slowed after he began a drug treatment and testing order (DTTO) in 2001 before he moved from injecting to smoking in 2005. Since 2007 Peter reported that he had only used heroin twice. Both times had been a reaction to the death of his Grandmother in 2009. His last official conviction was for theft and handling in 2003, while his use of heroin slowly decreased until 2007.

Peter worked for various periods over the time of the project. At the time of his 2010 interview he had been unemployed for 6 years apart from several temporary jobs. He had volunteered as a service user representative at the centre where he had received his treatment before becoming a volunteer staff member at the same centre.

Peter's desistance from crime and from his heroin use was, by his own account, a difficult process involving – as many accounts of desistance do – several 'relapses' back into offending. In Peter's case this involved sporadic use of heroin. Peter credits his DTTO in 2001 as being the "turning point" in his life that led to his eventual desistance from drug use some time later. What we wish to explore here is how the existential landscape of Peter's life changed and how the changes were interrelated to his desistance. We draw upon data from his 2003 and 2010 interviews because it is between these interviews that Peter's desistance from crime became more firmly established.

### 9.1. Peter from 2000-2003: The uncertain character of homespace

When interviewed in 2003 Peter's life project was centred around the cessation of his drug use. When asked about his ambitions for the next six months he spoke rather uncertainly of what the future might hold for him:

"I'm just gonna carry on working, just to keep me outta trouble. Cos if I don't then, then there's, there's always the risk that I'm gonna end up back wi' drugs and things, cos boredom is definitely an issue. Definitely. So I keep meself occupied."

At this time Peter was still using heroin regularly, despite his assertions that he wished to stop. His future project, as far as we can ascertain, was still somewhat vague and undefined, expressed in somewhat negative terms i.e. what he did not want to be.

Prior to 2000 Peter had lived in a large northern city in England in a flat he shared with his Grandmother. She left this city in 1999 to move to a nearby town and Peter followed her after "sofa surfing"<sup>6</sup> for a year before moving into her flat. Peter gave an account of the circumstances that led to this move:

"And then what happened, I actually got beat up by some vigilantes in [northern city]...So because of that I came to [current town], I thought right, I really need to change some things here you know. So I came to [current town], to this address that we're at now, which was, as I've said, was then my grandma's. And it also coincided with me getting a DTTO, around the year 2000, I think it was about 2001 I got a DTTO."

When interviewed in 2003 Peter lived with his Grandmother in her flat. As much as his move to his Grandmother's was prompted by the assault he was subject to it appeared from Peter's account that leaving the city in which he previously lived had been helpful for him in terms of stopping offending (his drug use aside):

"I feel a lot better cos I don't have to worry about getting a knock on door, you know... And I were always worried about knock on door, not so much for meself ...But it's me grandma's flat, you know, and I don't want them [the police] coming bashing me grandma's door down, things like that. So that's another good reason why I don't get involved any more, cos I don't want the attention for me grandma."

His attempts to abstain from heroin use however were still under threat by acquaintances he had made in the town and who knew where he lived:

"...when I were saying that lad came the other week wanting to come in here ...he tried everything to get me to let him in house, apparently he had no electric in his flat and he were wanting to sort hisself out,<sup>7</sup> he's saying "Oh well, you know what it's like, you've been there, don't be like that, let me in" and I'm saying "Well no, I've been clean for a long time, I don't need it plus this is me grandma's flat."...You can't escape it, you know...Other night a lad came and he banged on t' door and he offered me a tenner just to let him come in here to jack his sen up. And I sent him on his way, I sez "No, you're alright mate, get yourself off."

As much as he tried to abstain from drug use, Peter was unable to completely distance himself from sources of temptation and by his own account was still using heroin regularly, although from 2001 and his DTTO he had been using less frequently than he had previously. Using his Grandmother's flat as an 'excuse' to turn people away was one way he was able to use the flat to strengthen his resolve. Despite the advantages of living with his Grandmother Peter expressed some concern with this arrangement:

"I'm of the opinion that actually being here's holding me back in itself because I'm, they've got everything I want here. You know what I mean, I've three meals a day here, I don't have no cares at all and I think a bit of responsibility would probably do me good. [Int: So what do you need?] I think I need to go and get me own place and stand on me own two feet."

<sup>6</sup> i.e. staying on various friends' sofas.

<sup>7</sup> i.e. take heroin.

Peter was therefore starting to tentatively think about his life after drug use. His life project was slowly evolving, the meaning his Grandmother's flat had for him shifting alongside this. Although his Grandmother's departure from the city he lived in 1999 left Peter homeless and forced to "sofa surf", her new home in a different town gave him the opportunity to escape his previous circumstances. However, it was not until his physical safety was threatened (by the vigilantes) that Peter realised "I really need to change some things." By this point the fact his Grandmother lived somewhere else was an asset for Peter because it meant leaving his home city was an option for him. The threatening of physical safety can be an important part of motivations to change. Johnson and Ferraro (1984) outline how particularly severe cases of victimisation can lead to a 'victimised self' temporarily becoming a master narrative that obscures all other conceptions of self. The assault that Peter suffered had a similar impact on him, reorienting his life project towards stopping offending. Within this reorientation his Grandmother's was identified as a safe haven.

Peter gained far more than physical safety by moving in with his Grandmother, however. Consistent with his life project to abstain from drug use Peter enlisted a specific characterisation of his homespace to deter other drug users from entering and tempting him to use drugs. Specifically, he invoked a rhetoric of "Grandma's flat", surrendering control of his homespace as justification to turn away acquaintances who might encourage him to relapse into heroin use.

For all the uses of his Grandmother's flat, by the time of 2003 interview there was another element to Peter's homespace that he recounted. Peter felt that living with his Grandmother was "holding me back". By 2003 Peter's drug use was less frequent than it had been and he had received what would be his last conviction (as of 2010), for shoplifting. At this point his desire was to "stand on me own two feet". Concomitant with the progression of his desistance the flat he shared with his Grandmother became stultifying, denying him the opportunity to grow.

### *9.2. Peter from 2003-2010: Threats to the life project and desistance*

In his 2010 interview Peter was once again asked his ambitions. His last use of heroin had been fourteen months prior to this and, in contrast to 2003, his goals were more definite and Peter had begun to imagine himself as an ex-offender, itself a potentially important step in desisting from crime (Giordano *et al.* 2002). It is in the context of this more certain future project that Peter's life and his existential geography may be understood:

Int: What would you like to do [in the next 6 months]?

Peter: I'd like to do, I would still like to do youth work, but not with active drug users, I'd rather work with people to prevent them becoming drug users...And also I'd like to, if I were to be involved I'd like to do it at a higher level, because I feel I could benefit, benefit service users generally, far more if I can dictate the policies and the way things are done, than just handing out a few needles here and there and doing the odd urine test. So that's why I'd like to do, get a bit higher up the ladder.

Peter's Grandmother died in 2009 and as a result he had taken over the tenancy of the flat they had previously shared. Apart from two incidents (both in relation to the death of his Grandmother) Peter had not used heroin since 2007. With the cessation of his drug use more firmly established Peter's life project was directed towards what he, as an ex-offender, could accomplish. Despite his two relapses Peter was confident in his ability to abstain from drug use and positive about his life.

"...like I say, the main thing is I don't have to worry, I don't have to worry about Police coming and knocking on my door, or people stopping me in street and accusing me of things or. Just basically all the ducking and diving and the stress that comes with it, I just don't have it anymore."

It would appear that his earlier concerns about being “held back” by living with his Grandmother had been resolved. Peter was more in control of his homespace at this point. In addition, his flat had become a safer place for him to inhabit, free of disturbance from the police but also free of the approaches from other drug users that he had previously been subject to. At this point in his desistance the removal of his ‘excuse’ not to use (i.e. by stating that the property was his Grandmother’s) was less of a challenge in the context of the stronger desire to desist that he evidenced. However, as his desistance from drug use had progressed there were threats to his resolve and his future project now came from other spaces and the people who inhabited them.

Int: In terms of places you go, are there any places that you used to go but you now try and avoid?

Peter Yes [the] town centre, don’t go there because it’s full of all service users, especially on a Saturday, all out up to no good.

Int: Do you avoid it at set times or just...

Peter: I just don’t go, just don’t go into [town] at all really, unless I have to go to [treatment centre] I’ve never, since I’ve lived in [town] I’ve never really had any great associations with anybody, but there are people I try and avoid, because they are people that in the past have sidetracked<sup>8</sup> me and, you know what I mean, so I just, I do avoid them if I can.

Peter’s characterisation of the town centre indicates his concern with it as a threat to his life project. As a centre of meaning for Peter it obstructed his goals. Other threats to his project were constituted in objects that reminded Peter of his drug use:

“I mean simple silly little things like phone boxes. I mean there is a phone box around here that I used to use all the time, to phone my dealer and every time I walk past it, it comes in my head, the name of my dealer and his... I memorised his phone number and do you know what I mean, but just don’t act on it.”

Although Peter had gained control of his homespace he could do little to restrict the movements of others outside it, nor could he prevent objects from reminding him of his past. His sense of self *Vis a Vis* his status as an ex drug user informed and was informed by his awareness of the shrinking of his existential landscape and that the number of areas in which he could ‘safely’ exist had been reduced significantly. From Peter’s account it seemed that he spent his time between the home and the centre he volunteered at. Part of his desistance was therefore about identifying which places were a threat to his future project and attempting to limit his movement within them.

The development of Peter’s relationship with the space he called ‘home’ changed as he progressed towards desistance and his future project shifted to account for his developing sense of who he could become. Peter’s drug use during this time was rather frequent even while it represented a decline from his previous use of heroin. Peter appeared to relate to his existential landscape in an unconscious fashion (Buttimer 1980, Seamon and Sowers 1999). The taken for granted nature of the city he lived in and the meaning it held in his life was only brought into relief when he was attacked, the assault apparently encouraging the ‘deep reflection’ necessary to identify what the city meant to him (Buttimer 1976). Identifying this experience as motivating him to desist prompted a more general reflection on his life, in the same way that victimisation experiences sometimes can for other offenders (Cusson and Pinnsonneault 1986, Hughes 1998). The resolution of this for Peter was his identifying the nearby town his Grandmother had moved to as a safe haven and a fresh start for him to attempt to stop his drug use. That the city was viewed as ‘dangerous’ while the town his Grandmother lived in was ‘safe’ is apparent from Peter’s account. But further to this is what the small town offered to Peter in terms

<sup>8</sup> i.e. persuaded him to use heroin.

of its desistance potential. In accordance with his future project as a non-offender Peter identified the town as a place he could successfully achieve his goals. His self-exclusion from the city is also an example of offenders enacting what Bottoms (2013) describes as a form of situational crime prevention, whereby situations and settings are avoided because of their potential to derail attempts to refrain from offending. The gradual decline in his drug use suggests he was successful but his desistance from drug use brought its own problems into Peter's home space. It was now a place where other drug users could find him, bringing temptation to his door. The character of his homespace actually became potentially more threatening the greater the progress Peter made in desisting from his drug use. From the haven it represented in 2000 when he wished to leave the city it became a space he had to manage, partly to prevent those he used drugs with from entering and upsetting his Grandmother but also to assist him in avoiding drug use. For these reasons Peter's home space became – for a while – more of a threat as he proceeded in his desistance, not.

As the frequency of Peter's drug use decreased however, along with an increase in his confidence came a concern that living with his Grandmother was holding him back. His aspirations had developed past the point of 'not using drugs' and coalesced into something more positive yet somehow less definable. Peter desired a home of his own and the necessity of having to do things for himself. With this shift in his life project and his desire to stand on his own two feet the previously identified security of his home was viewed accordingly. His desire to develop corralled by his relationship with his Grandmother. By the time he was interviewed in 2010 this conflict had been partly resolved by the death of his Grandmother and his taking ownership of the flat. Peter's homespace was therefore one he was happy within as it did not threaten his most recent conceptualisation of his life project.

Just as the meaning his homespace had for him evolved, so did the meaning Peter placed upon his town. Although apparently successful in attempting to desist from drug use there were few places in town centre that Peter felt comfortable going, although he could not avoid the town centre completely due to his volunteer work. As with his homespace, the meaning of his town had become more threatening as his drug use became less frequent. The resonance of particular geographical features (Ingold 1993), as exemplified by the phone box he previously used to call his dealer indicate Peter's progress but also the difficulties inherent in leaving an offending past behind.

These changes in Peter's existential geography underscore in part how far he has come in terms of his offending. Note also however that there have been few changes in Peter's physical geography.<sup>9</sup> He lived in precisely the same place he had for the previous nine years and still went to the treatment centre he had attended, albeit this time as a volunteer rather than for treatment. This is important because it demonstrates that although Peter's physical geography has not changed, his existential geography has. The meaning attached to different places transformed as he desisted from drug use.

## 10. Conclusions

We have tried to avoid drawing any causal inferences in discussing the role of family, work and other commitments and place and space with regards to desistance from drug use. That is, we do not definitively say that desisters first desist and then acquire routines/move to new places. Nor do we argue that persisters move/acquire routines and then desist as a result. Thinking solely in

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<sup>9</sup> We acknowledge that Peter moved from the city he lived in at the time of his first interview in order to live with his Grandmother, but this was 7 years prior to his last use of heroin. Peter regularly used heroin and sought treatment for his addiction in this new locale and therefore he established an identity as a drug user and subsequently as an ex drug user after this move.

terms of causality does not do justice to the human experiences our respondents report and the constant interplay between the life project, sense of self and the existential geography offenders hold. It is the case that, for our desisters, moves away from their home area were frequently a clear part of their desistance narrative e.g. as was the case for Eugene. Contrast this with the feelings of being 'trapped' reported to us by persisting drug users – who were almost all still living in the places where they had grown up. Spatial moves at the interregional level therefore *do* appear to be part of the story of desistance for many drug users (for more on this see Farrall *et al.* 2014). However, Peter's case indicates the difficulty in trying to ascribe a causal order to the relationship between desistance and changes in one's existential geography. It could be that his understanding of the way the landscape of his existence had changed (for example, that his Grandmother's flat was holding him back) encouraged a reflection on his offending and prompted a desire to change. Conversely, perhaps his formulation of a life project as an ex drug user led to a shift in his understanding of those places where he spent his time. More likely, we suggest, is that desistance and existential change are interwoven, each informing the other.

Therefore, whilst it is possible to make some 'causality-like' statements, the real cause of both the spatial dynamics of desistance (or persistence) and actual desistance (or persistence) in the case of drug users<sup>10</sup> is 'something else'. This 'something else' varies from person to person and reflects both individuals' own desires to change and the wider spatial and social structures they inhabit. Like Steve, nobody wants to live in poor housing, hence those who could moved on (usually by virtue of employment), whilst those who could not move on found their lives revolving around ever-decreasing circles partly brought about by formal and informal agencies (such as drugs agencies and dealers) moving in to meet their needs. These processes associated with the deviant economy helped to entrap injecting users in specific locations.

Peter's example demonstrates a different way of conceptualising the relationship between places and desistance from crime. Much desistance research has tended to assume that the separation of offender from place is a necessary prerequisite – or at least a great aid for – the process of desistance. So partners restrict offenders' movements (Laub and Sampson 2003) and offenders also make efforts to exile themselves from places where offending might occur (Scott 2004, Flynn 2010, Hughes 1998). But disengagement from place can be cognitive and emotional rather than physical. In much the same way that the narrative desisters tell about their offending past sees that past become reconstructed rather than 'amputated' (Maruna and Roy 2007), desisters subjective relationship with place can come to be redefined. As much as offenders can remove themselves from locations that might encourage crime, as some of the persisters' accounts indicate, not all will have the opportunity to remove themselves, wholesale from the areas they associate with their offending. Peter's example indicates that desisters' existential geographies are likely to encompass numerous places and spaces in which offending took place or which provided the backdrop for chance encounters that led to offending that cannot subsequently be avoided forever. Desisting from drug use and the identity management concurrent with this may be an example of the sort of deep reflection Buttimer (1976) argues is necessary to consider the existential landscape of our lives. An understanding of the way in which places can be managed so as to facilitate desistance is therefore crucial to further unpacking the processes associated with moving away from offending. Places are not just the locations within which desistance takes place. Understanding what certain places mean underpins efforts to desist.

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<sup>10</sup> We explore these processes for offenders more generally (i.e. not just with drug users) elsewhere (Farrall *et al.* 2014, chapter 6).

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