Placing Research: 'City Publics' and the 'Public Sociologist'

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Abstract

This article raises questions about who becomes the proper subject for (non)academic attention in a time when 'city publics' might be positioned as democratising and open or, conversely, as curtailed and shaped through specific and pre-determined economies of value and use. The use of the city and its residents are echoed in regeneration politics and objectives, attached to and brought forward by specific 'regenerative' subjects, now deemed 'resilient' and capacitated. Such rhetorics of inclusion and measurable impact are echoed within ideas of a 'public sociology', which the engaged researcher should practice as she re-engages differently located spaces and subjects. Here, questions are raised about the place of a 'public sociology' as part of a 'city publics', where understanding local disseminations and disparities is important in considering where different users, interviewees and indeed researchers are coming from. Having situated the fieldwork site, we initially focus on the expert advisory group and their constructions of the project's 'use-value'. We then consider the background 'shadows' in and out of 'expert' space, as a trailing presence of research intentions and trajectories. Ideas of public sociology – as with an open 'city publics' - often assumes that all users are interested, willing to hear and appear as equal members of a 'community'. In contrast, the experience of engaging a user group may involve dis-engaging the research-researcher-researched and here we provide disruptions to a straightforward 'travelling through' research space as we walk through our research methodologies. This article presents professional and personal reflections on research experience as well as interpretative accounts of navigating fieldwork and city space.

Introduction: Class, gender and 'fitting into place'

1.1 This paper is based on ESRC[1] funded research (2007-2009) and, as the project title '*From the coal face to the car park? The intersection of class and gender in women's lives in the North East of England*' implies, the objectives lie in charting gendered transitions from the industrial landscapes of one or two generations ago, to a current present and (imagined) regenerated future. The concern is with the reconfiguration of class and gender relations in relation to spatialised urban-rural 'publics', where 'future selves' are constructed in specific settings, managed and negotiated as people live out shifting geographies and temporalities. In aiming to capture manifold intersections of history, geography and economy, a multi-dimensional approach was adopted to explore middle-class and working-class women's lives (n=97) in the context of de-industrialisation and the transition to a post-industrial economy, where processes of 'fitting into place' are subject to contestation (Taylor and Addison, 2009; Taylor 2011a). Put simply, the research argues that change differently impacts on people and places: such changes occur and are contested over time and across space, affecting overlapping arenas such as labour, leisure and residential sites. Change impacts on feelings of belonging, in moving forward or being 'left behind', where desires, hopes and resentments intersect with material (im)possibilities. Thus, classed and gendered revisions *and* persistences are discussed here in relation to the particular fieldwork site, the North East of England, as a methodological as well as theoretical concern, in terms of activating 'city publics' and practicing (or failing) 'public sociology' (Burawoy, 2005). The moves forward, into and through the spaces of access, use, knowledge and value, are troubled in considering the specific 'city publics' of the North East, as well as the 'public sociology' efforts of researchers. Broadly, the research is concerned with the ways that interviewees respond to, take up or 'lose out' in the regeneration of the North East and to break down these experiences into very different understandings of space and time. Such concerns are practically related to the (in)accessibility of research practices, audiences, users and communities in and even

beyond the fieldwork site.

1.2 Examination of diverse spaces and places for different groups of women provides important evidence on the complexity of – and the need for more inclusive approaches to – transforming lives and localities. Methodological questions of access, accounts with women across the age range (16-85 yrs), researchers' travels and troubles, and user-group dissemination, are interrogated to untangle varied positioning within socio-spatial transition where people are put 'in place' as incapable of change, behind or with the times. These (mis)positions shape what can be heard, who can listen and how, and who can do the telling and where this telling occurs – as more than a public presence or event of simple transference. Narratives of economic, social and cultural regeneration versus decline and degeneration, as mapped onto regional and localised identifications and official investments are reproduced in variations or entrenchments to gendered and classed experiences: positioning people in and out of place, as mothers, workers, consumers, citizens and residents. The shape of place features as an embodied expression and an embedded corporeal gendered-classed 'habit': the identities of daughter, young woman and mother inscribe meanings to (the ageing of) women's bodies and the (mis)placed and (dis)located body which navigates the right and wrong time/place (including research times and places) (Taylor 2011a).

1.3 In the middle of troubled and insecure financial times, and vast public sector cut-backs, navigating the differential impact of 'crisis' and 'ways forward' for *particular* communities involves attention to the situatedness of experience and the intersections of gender and classed (dis)locations. Many parts of the North East (both urban and rural) are still heavily coded as masculine and 'working-class', given the legacy, both materially and culturally, of male-orientated heavy industry (particularly coal mining and shipbuilding) and the loss of this (Nayak, 2003). Despite an often assumed 'fit' within a 'feminised' economy it is working-class women who will bear the brunt of the UK government's cuts to welfare and public services, whether as users of public services or as public sector workers. These embedded and embodied miseries emerging from neo-liberal re-structuring of the state trouble the place of publics and 'public sociologists' (Kenway and McLeod 2004).

1.4 In terms of economic loss and vulnerability the North East is now going through a very challenging period, under-performing in comparison to other UK regions[2]: It is not necessarily the secure or durable 'Northern Rock', even as much is made of its up and coming increasing potential (before and during the global economic downturn). Moreover, 'local' space is not homogenously the 'same' or equally 'resilient' or 'becoming'; the enduring coding of some parts of the North East as 'grim and grit', often invoked with reference to and persistence of the industrial 'past', is made more complex in exploring the varied investment and negotiations within this as actors (dis)identify with regional regeneration and 'degeneration'. Where a certain 'coming forward' propels subjects and cities as sites of (insecure) investments (credentialised, known and celebrated for their *potential*), such attention can be usefully re-located to a less 'cosmopolitan', more ambivalent and contradictory, urban-rural region. The mis-fit between crisis and potential, loss and gain, becoming and backwardness, is regionally complex: not all Northerners are 'left behind' or able to 'come forward' in (re)claiming and (re)materializing their sense of place. Histories and habits of place intersect with more global flows in and through place (Savage et al., 2005; Nayak and Kehily 2008), felt through the intersections of biography and geography and told through life stories, accounts and experiences which tell the past, present and future differently (Dillabough and Kenelly 2010).

1.5 Like other UK regions, the North East of England has faced economic transformation in response to global change, impacting upon the urban landscape, old manufacturing towns, ex-shipbuilding communities and rural mining villages (Paton, 2010; Parker, 2010). Where the region was once built upon shipbuilding, coal mining and heavy engineering, it now relies on service and knowledge-based employment. Manufacturing, business services and the public sector are dominant sectors of the contemporary North East economy (see Colls and Lancaster, 1992; Nayak, 2003; and Taylor and Addison, 2009for a more thorough description and historicisation of regional change). There has been long term economic underperformance in some rural areas of the region, which are defined as 'lagging behind' in relation to the South of England. Yet the main cities of the region have undergone considerable redevelopment with tourism becoming important: the proximity between urban and rural destinations is highlighted in marketing locations such as the Pennine Hills, the Cheviot Hills and the Northumberland National Park as a touristic draw. Unsurprisingly, the ex-mining coalfield community of Easington Colliery is not packaged as part of the new tourist potential, with the last coal mines closing in 1993, bringing drastic changes to its economy, community and housing stock.

1.6 The quest for culture, employment and overall 'liveability' is based on attracting and retaining the middle-classes, instigating a 'coming forward' by the responsible active citizen with the right capacities and potential. Working-class residents are implicitly coded as residue, the source of place-based problems, waste and regional lag (Clavering, 2010; Paton, 2010; Walkerdine, 2009). Regeneration and gentrification have been woven more tightly together with city competition, welfare and workfare policies, as part of neo-liberal urban governance. Within such logics, areas and their inhabitants have been deemed in need of 'place shaping' in order to become part of a future and saved from a failed past or social-spatial 'death'. This is evident in policies of city councils acting as 'place-shapers', actively seeking to rebrand and 'place-shape' the North East as a place of '*Passionate People, Passionate Places*'[3]: In these projects, residents are responsibilised as *active* citizens, through, for example, Neighbourhood Watch Schemes. The appraisal of 'those who can' move forward and improve place frequently implies that some cannot: residents are accordingly implicated in their own decline and responsible for their own 'degeneration'. Such mis-placement resonates with long-standing discourses that pathologise the poor as irresponsible, beyond help, and at odds with contemporary 'city publics' done by desired citizens who are able to activate, claim and improve space (Haylett 2001,Watson 2006).

1.7 By invoking and disputing the boundaries of 'community', this research necessarily engages in thinking

through epistemological, theoretical and ethical issues in mobilising 'city publics' and (dis)engaging as a 'public sociologist'. The entrepreneurial university – and indeed the 'entrepreneurial' funded researcher – has been tasked with making an impact in regenerating cities, responsibilising citizens to come forward and make a difference as part of a 'Big Society' (as conveyed in shifting funding priorities). Here the local and the global intersect in university efforts targeting 'local' and 'far away' markets (Taylor and Scurry, 2011), with heightened efforts in a time of massive cut-backs: the once 'public' university must revitalise its markets, spaces and subjects through more privatised economies of monetary use and value. New buzzwords of 'impact' and 'engagement' appear in missions statements, with new signs branding the engaged institution (Taylor 2011b): regional economic development is anticipated from academic flows of learning/knowledge transfer, and 'communities' and users are placed in need of an academic who then 'transfers' knowledge. 'Use' has thus been woven into the landscape of the North East, through rebranding Northern resilience – supposedly capturing character and place – just as it has been woven into an economy of knowledge more generally.

1.8 The impact of research findings as they (dis)connect to a broader city/regional 'publics' in constraining and enabling opportunities in the North East deserves attention within these new economies of access, use, and engagement, through which a 'city publics' and indeed the 'public sociologist' is constructed. Burawoy states that 'Public sociology brings sociology into a conversation with publics' which '…must extend to the organic kind which often remains invisible, private, and is often considered to be apart from our professional lives. The project of such public sociologies is to make visible the invisible, to make the private public, to validate these organic connections as part of our sociological life' (2005: 7-8). There is, however, a potential conflict between the classification of types of 'publics' and 'use' (applied policy versus organic public sociologic and the 'hierarchies of credibility' between these, see Becker, 1967). Considering what a 'public sociology' looks and feels like leads to questions about which publics, which communities, which conversations, which 'transfers'? And how should these be 'transferred' given that the impact agenda, in and beyond the university, demands outputs as tangible products rather than as relational, always ongoing, incomplete (even 'failed') learning processes? What determines a 'use' or indeed a 'subject'? Which subjects are in the foreground and which are in the shadows? The following sections detail fieldwork experiences, reflections and dis-connections in highlighting the classed and gendered construction of proper subjects in (not) 'fitting into place' via new research economies as a dis-connect between research-researched-researcher. While site specific, such queries have resonances across time and space, posing question about how differential understandings and experiences are translated into research practices and through and for (non)academic users, interviewees and broader publics.

Public property: (mis)using data

2.1 The 'invitation to listen' could, Back (2007) argues, include scholars, publics, activists, journalists, in collaboration and a community of users, sharing ideas and instigating dialogues. This research project certainly tried to foster equal dialogues but where much has been said of the practice and need for a more 'public sociology', positioning academics as the source of impact and expertise, there has to be attention towards practices that are silenced and knowledges that are subsumed when the impact of impact agendas have already been determined.[4] In reaching out to non-academic audiences there is a drive to do something different with data, while research integrity necessitates keeping something of its sociological contents central. Through user group engagement, the central issue of participation and the 'use' of sociology, was ruptured and recreated in conversations, which allowed a sense of where researchers and 'users' were coming from: as sometimes quite far apart (Taylor, 2010). As with long-standing feminist interventions on knowledge, economies of use and articulation, Back offers insight into the limits of writing and the complexities of dialogue and listening (as against a 'knowledge transfer'): 'As well as providing an opportunity to reach a wider audience, stepping out in public as a sociologist can also involve vulnerability and political compromise' (2007: 161, see also Skeggs, 2004). In this research there were challenges in communicating data to the project user-group as the complexities of fieldwork, recruitment, access and findings were arguably obscured in presenting a discernible 'usable' message. Such a message was not simply transferred to users but rather specific 'uses' were anticipated if not demanded from them as pre-existing investors in the North East. Here we initially focus on the expert advisory group and their constructions of the research as (potentially) having a 'use-value'; we then consider the background 'shadows' in and out of 'expert' space, as a trailing presence of research intentions and trajectories. These points are relevant to an impact agenda which often assumes that all 'users' are interested, willing to hear and can appear as equal members of a 'community'; in contrast, the experience of engaging a user group may involve *dis-engaging* the research-researcher-researched. More broadly the 'scrutinizing imperative' is not intended to entirely undermine use – either 'ours' or 'theirs' – but to socially situate '…viewpoints and perspectives more able to buttress the epistemological security of sociology' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992 quoted in Kenway and McLeod 2004: 528) .

2.2 The project user group was composed of officials from local city councils, regional development agencies, local entrepreneurs, voluntary service providers, and cultural providers and researchers hoped to convey enduring class and gender inequalities to invested, concern North East actors. Invitations to three findings presentation were distributed and newsletters were delivered to the above group and to interviewees throughout the duration of the project (2007-2009). In our first meeting all members in entering the well-signposted university room expressed a degree of surprise that we were indeed ourselves – members of the university, a lecturer, a 'Dr.' (One day the young feminist academic will walk into the classroom and she'll be *old*; there never seems a right time to 'be' in academia, to be 'public'). As young women we were already being 'placed', suspected of being out of place in *our* (university) place. The familiar accusation waged against feminist enquiry was another early introduction: wasn't the research already a bit biased (researchers 'obviously' presenting/speaking 'as women')?

2.3 In presenting on matters of regional development and inequality, users where given information and data via power point slides with allocated time for discussion and feedback. The panel of delegates

seemed very familiar with this form of dissemination and debate, likely being already at home with such a format from their own institutional practices. Indeed users presented a practiced sense of confidence and familiarity which meant that meetings became overly-professionalized. Recognising – and indeed defending – working professionalisms, users tended to treat the sessions as though they were clients and researchers were delivering on a piece of research that users had themselves commissioned (rather than having been externally funded by the ESRC). In deflecting and utilising certain rhetorical and visual practices of being present and 'professional' in the room, we inwardly congratulated ourselves that interviewees were not a direct part of this elite dissemination: although their 'voices' were there via 'our' data the non-transference or non-translatability of such voices occurred to us as we sought out an expert-elite 'usefulness'.

2.4 During the meeting both researchers recognised this marketization of the research process as well as our own implicatedness in this: the data and the sample were being sized up and evaluated in terms of a 'use value'. The delegates were, it seemed, aiming to draw a return on their (relatively small) investment of time and energy in the research. Each representative came with an agenda of how their local organisations could use the data to justify policy making and pre-existing priorities. This is perhaps understandable in that where use is conveyed it will be anticipated and even measured. But users were approaching the research according to *pre-existing* logics of worth and evaluation, even though the research had already been conducted and findings 'found'. As such effort and care has to be exercised in foregrounding and activating sociological objectives where these are marginalised and replaced with a set of market driven objectives and tools for analysis (sample sizes, objective measures and social truths were the valued currencies of the day). This was evident as users variously queried the sample sizes (n=97) – was this robust enough? Why did researchers design a *qualitative* methodology, where was the survey data that they were more familiar with?

2.5 Sociological concerns, in querying who could 'fit into' place, were arguably overshadowed by slippage between a broader public 'use' and a specific use value for *them* as clients. Each adopted a dominant position within the group meetings, asking 'what is the point in this research *for us*?' Delegates wanted to know why interviews were collected from specific locales in the North East and whether interview accounts were in fact 'true' reflections of what it is like to live in the North East. Working-class areas were frequently written off as bad examples of a North East regional value: couldn't we have researched other, less troubled places? We were re-directed to middle-class locales as more representative, more usable, more appealing. There was a disconnect in presenting data and emerging grounded themes (for example, interviewees speaking against regeneration initiatives in their neighbourhoods and communities), as against a search for confirmation of existing policies and practices (regeneration and regional 'resilience' as the way forward) (see Bristow, 2010). Despite extensive interviewee queries on who regeneration actually serves, as a profoundly classed experience, it was assumed that it was working across the North East and any continued disadvantage could be rectified by applying it more fully.

2.6 When themes of class cut through the discussions, as evidenced and named in the data, users tended to refer to celebrations of (male) 'working-class successes' in the region (often referring to their own 'working-class' backgrounds) and how these successes could be 'sold' as part of the 'Americanised *Tyneside* dream'. The user group wanted to hear about more success stories within the data and how this could be marketed as 'good and right' social mobility. So-called unsuccessful stories of 'failure', such as accounts of young women feeling uncomfortable using emblematic places of culture such the Baltic art gallery, were perceived as blights on the North East 'brand'. Rather than seeing these cultural sites as engendering class distinctions (as argued by the researchers), the young women were subject to vocal 'social engineering' – as users discussed how these young women could (and should) be more engaged with culture: What could be done to *make* them like that space? Why were they not 'coming forward' as regenerated subjects? Regenerated space was validated to coercively *shape* people into becoming, or exclude them as backward. Here, people become the problem, not place. Participating as a consumer of culture, economy and space was thus viewed a pre-requisite to active citizenship. If, like the young working-class women excluded from the Baltic, people could not engage with space or demonstrate aspirations to consume, then they appeared to fall outside of the vision these users had of the North East. Some of the group felt that the research would be 'useful' if it could be used to set the region apart from other areas in the UK, through 'strong evidence' (i.e. quantifiable) of regional 'resilience'. Others felt that the research could be used to identify gaps in policies; when gaps in 'regenerating' people and place are identified then professional services could move in.

2.7 Following meetings, every participant was given evaluation forms to synthesise thoughts and responses – as invested researchers we did want to check-in on communications. In feedback the (im)proper 'mother' figure, as a valorized *and* denigrated bearer of nationhood and community, frequently appeared – to the direct contrast of researchers attentiveness to intersecting inequalities of gender, class and sexuality, as located beyond the bodies of interviewees themselves (Skeggs,1997; Taylor, 2007). Most of the users felt that many young women in the area suffered from low self esteem and poor mental health which was connected to 'low aspirations' and not wanting to participate in higher education, instead continuing in 'unstable relationships' and 'falling' pregnant. It was felt that these women were currently more likely to become young mothers, increasing the number of what they viewed to be 'non-sustainable' families in the region. Burdensome 'teenage pregnancies' were viewed a as barrier to a more middle-class lifestyle which would help in regenerating the region. The Office for National Statistics data highlights high regional rates of teenage pregnancy in the North East: but this objective truth dis-connects with subjective experience of interviewees themselves. Expert audiences were convinced that the *most* pertinent gender issue was that of teenage pregnancy – a facet remarkably minimal to both younger and older women's accounts in this research, revealing the discordance between 'expert' and 'everyday' discourses and experiences (Vitellone, 2008; Parker, 2010). One interviewees' words, presented to this group, highlights some of the dis-connections and discomfort in enacting – or compelling change – hinting too at the erasure of class as an explanatory device, as deprivation in situated on women's bodies ('Mothers deprived') in

specific places. This interviewee does herself articulate a concern with professionalized 'publics' and its potentially problematic groupings and interventions:

> And a lot of it, in the work that I'm doing currently, they…the strategic managers that dictate how we are and why we are doing the work we are doing, which is about teenage pregnancy, we are pushed to work in areas that they call, 'Mothers deprived', which they are, but with community groups that have low aspirations. And you kind of think, 'Are they trying to…kind of saying working-class, but not wanting to say working-class' because it's sort of seen as a bit of an uncomfortable word, or phrase, to use. (Lisa, 29)

2.8 Users stated that a lack of career opportunities for *graduates* in the region meant that these *valued* individuals were likely to mobilise their capitals and move to another part of the country, leaving behind 'social problems': alcohol, drug use and pregnancy. Obesity and body image were also considered to be issues facing young women, where social disadvantage was firmly located in and on their bodies, as against their middle-class counterparts who could make the right choices as responsible subjects (this is endorsed in a range of reports including the North East of England Health Summit 2004 report *Promoting aspirations amongst children and young people of the North* authored by a similar pool of local investors, including the Regional Development Agency: here we are warned of obesity, smoking, lack of breast feeding and 'skinny babies').

2.9 In feeding back, users claimed that adult women would already be managing careers and families – they were positioned as the main care givers to children, parents and partners, where it was noted that women are the last priority in this matrix of care. Recognition combined with mis-recognition; the expectation was that women of this age, whilst running a home and organising a family, *should* be continually adding to and developing their capitals (qualifications) in order to progress professionally. If these women did not *yet* have children then it was assumed they would certainly be thinking about having them and that this would affect their careers and ability to compete. These women were also positioned as *choosers*, selecting schools (within a local economy of choice) and strengthening the educational attainment of their children. Implicit within this feedback is that these 'good mothers' would have the knowledge and connections in order to make this imagined future a reality for their children (Taylor, 2009). This demographic were described as more mobile and aspirational – markedly different from their younger counterparts, denigrated as 'failing' 'teen mums'.

2.10 But apparent inclusion also has 'othering' effects: adult women were implicitly described as being in heterosexual, married and stable relationships, always accumulating capitals and potential – having children *and* a career *and* educational qualifications. These imagined women were perceived to be an asset to the region whose presence needs to be capitalised upon: these imaginings were projected into data as 'findings' and/or 'failures'. While full of potential, this was seen as compromised by women themselves, as concerns were again personally, rather than socially, situated. Problems facing adult women were reported as self esteem, diets, mental health, binge drinking, violence and abuse: these were linked to divorce and the fracturing of futures, so well endorsed. The implication seemed to be that these women had to get hold of themselves and their families. Such women were positioned as care givers for parents and loved ones and time was considered to be a major constraining factor in fulfilling this role and maintaining family ties. Attention did, at times, turn from the individual and onto the surrounding area, with older women being viewed as vulnerable to crime in their local neighbourhoods. Constructions of vulnerability still intersecting notions of care, protection, capacity and culpability in gendered, generational and classed ways. The point here is not to dismiss these dialogues but rather to foreground the difficulties where there are problems with use, users, communication and listening, not necessarily resolved by a neat 'transfer' of knowledge. Enduring feelings in face-to-face meetings were often ones of frustration and disbelief: the data itself was being silenced as a professional, middle-class voice edited over the surface to make it 'useable' (Taylor 2011b). Awareness of this can then compel other geographies and sociologies of responsibility (Back 2007).

Reaching out, giving back: Elite and 'other' users

3.1 In still seeking to engage and make an impact beyond elite users, a range of local groups were approached, community events attended and advertisements placed in general newsletters and newspapers. In doing 'community engagement' as a practical, fieldwork presence and ongoing dialogue, more requests for interviews were received than originally anticipated. These were conducted as a process of engagement beyond a numerical target, although the reasons for exceeding sample size – as a measure – was then something queried in producing a final report; why had we gone beyond people and places, should we have told groups once welcomed and solicited that we had too many of their 'type', that we had made enough use of them? As 'locals' and residents of the North East – and as researchers at an institution in the North East, our intentions were rarely questioned. In using community space, the only criteria was often that we simply 'give something back': in working-class women's groups this tended to be food and childcare costs (as requested) while in groups attracting middle-class women both the PI and the Research Assistant, were asked to give more information regarding our 'studies' – and ourselves – suggestive of awkward and interesting processes in inhabiting differently classed local space (see Taylor and Addison, 2009).

3.2 One residents' association, in the most affluent area, was particularly interested in academic credentials and abilities: how long had positions at the University been held and how did we come to be there? Feeling ourselves to be classed in these spatialised dis-locations was revealing and dis-comforting; sometimes seen as locals, as fellow professionals or alternatively recognised as simply 'young'. There were clear classed differences to the responses received, ranging from complete surprise that we could be interested in their lives (a much repeated 'why us?') to a sense that we *should* be attracted to and aware of their politically engaged activities (such as the ever-praised Neighbourhood Watch Schemes). One

women's group, in an affluent area within the sample was well used to being consulted and listened to, having managed to successfully challenge the local authority on residents' parking and late night drinking licenses, also receiving media coverage as a result of their success. Differently again, the co-ordinators of one youth group had such a hard time managing and responding to the everyday problems of their members that participating in the research project was almost impossible and, at times, constituted an unnecessary infringement on their – materially and emotionally – constrained space and time. Such initial encounters served as a reminder of the efforts still needed in researching different women's lives, where these differences and inequalities can be somewhat eclipsed in measures of impact, samples and use and where ideas of pluralizing a 'city publics' may themselves invoke problematic notions of limits and returns from (un)deserving residents.

3.3 The vulnerability and over-researching of different groups was repeatedly demonstrated and negotiated across samples. One gatekeeper felt that women in poorer areas were over-consulted by local government about area regeneration issues, while continually being situated in terms of moral and ecological decay or 'degeneration' (Taylor, 2004): they were placed as 'in need' and 'beyond help', which structured professional intervention and research attention from outsiders seeking to look 'in' on 'hard to reach' groups (Parker, 2010; Armstrong, 2010). Kim, like other interviewees, describes regeneration as an oddly reversed scenario, where those who need the most receive the least. She also criticizes the non-sense of 'crazy' consultation where what people want is a shared and obvious fact:

> …God knows how much they've spent on the consultation, it's just obscene. And then what they do is, there's five men who say 'Right well what we've discovered from our consultation is that, the people in Walker want good schools, youth services, nice houses, things for old people' and whatever and you just think 'Well, I could have told you that. What you mean they just want the same things as anybody else?' It's just crazy. And all the documents they produce are just woolly. They mean nothing … But then a lot of people would say that they've been invited to loads of events and nobody's turned up. So…..
> (Kim, 35, Byker)

3.4 Kim reveals how the invitation to participate becomes a non-sense given the pre-existing and exclusionary set-up of 'access', already structured around particular vocabularies and resources (embodied and represented through 'five men who say…'). Being rather suspicious of institutions and even researchers becomes understandable in such a context and required being there on these working-class estates (as well as being there or being called upon by middle-class users). Many areas, both urban and rural, did not seem substantively included in regional regeneration strategies; instead residents face the burden and stigma of experiencing their areas as 'degenerating', going 'downhill' and being left somewhat off the map as urban inner city space improves. One fieldwork site, the working-class community of Byker has gained notoriety as a place ever-subject to housing policy directives. The Byker Wall development as a protected architectural site has foregrounded the visual and the aesthetic over and above its residential capacities (Clavering, 2010). Here, as in other marginalised places, we found deep cynicism about the local authority's regeneration scheme[5].

3.5 The heading of 'regeneration', as a literal and visual sign of 'coming forward', is proudly advertised on large billboards as you enter each designated regeneration area around the North East. Despite this pronouncement of 'improving people and improving places', accessing women living in certain working-class council estates was often experienced as a more distant journey than anticipated, as the architecture, design and planning produced a specific zone which could not easily be approached or accessed. The Byker Wall as a 'well designed', protective space (supposedly blocking the noise from the bypass) sits in contrast with residents' experiences of this as a space of confusion and unrest, which the police, like the residents, were often concerned and vigilant about. The feeling of being monitored, rather than being *listened* to, was very real for some interviewees, where the numerous CCTV cameras on working-class estates were spoken of not as security or safety but as a penalty focusing on their comings and goings. This was discussed with reference to benefit fraud monitoring features as the backdrop for social policy initiatives legislating against 'anti-social behaviours', 'familial disorder', 'dysfunction', 'dangerous masculinities' and 'dependent femininities' – reappearing in user group conversations (see Haylett 2001; Skeggs 2004). Such architectures of 'danger' literally landscape research/professional 'interventions'.

3.6 One research visit involved taking part in a community event situated in the working-class area of Byker bringing together a young female drama group; asylum seekers living in the Byker Wall; a Drug Awareness group; a Local Mothers group, and other community groups deemed deprived and in need of intervention. Despite good research intentions and planning, just finding this event proved to be quite difficult in itself. With the map freshly printed out from Google, the venue appeared accessible and straightforward from the Metro station. We initially headed towards the High Street and soon realised that we were going in the wrong direction: we stopped and asked for directions from a well-placed local policeman sitting in his car, and noted the greater police presence on the streets. Despite shared geographical knowledge, and police guidance, it proved no easy task finding the community venue because of the maze-like territory of the estate. Finding the entrances to the Wall was difficult and passing through it and navigating the area within was impossible, requiring a security code after residents experienced a series of repeated break-ins and attacks. Passing through the Wall to get inside the estate is not security blocked but the difficulty persisted in de-coding unmarked alleys and the maze of overlapping, unnamed, built-up streets. Restricted visual clues constituted another sensory and material blockage.

3.7 In our pursuits we headed in what we hoped was the right direction, passing a football match in the middle of the road, as young men claimed this space as theirs. We came to a stop at a set of garages; there was broken glass on the ground and, feeling lost, we looked about us, above us and there were

balconies overhead looking down. There was no way to see the way forward, and the prospect of retracing our tracks equally confusing. Just as we thought we might be running out of time, a local woman resident, carrying heavy shopping bags started to walk towards us and directed us with sympathy; she knew how misleading the avenues could be even though she'd lived there for years. She offered to take us to our destination and we abandoned our Google map. Taking an immediate left and walking down the side of one of the smaller two-story houses, we were flushed out into a new street altogether totally invisible, it seemed, if you did not already know the way. Our guide told us the confusing streets were a saviour for local gangs who could lose the police in this web; even switching to mountain bikes apparently could not help the police where the twists and turns come up very fast. In walking through this area, the difficulties in access – even to participate in a 'community' event – were sharply felt. That there was no signposting or publicity for the event made us wonder about the ways this place was variously lost to and found by insiders and outsiders in their very different local inhabitations. Such confusions and confinements are reflected in one interviewee's comments about living on the estate:

> Yes, and the street names are just bonkers. It's really hard to relate the street name to the street you are looking for and things like that.
> I: Yes, I was looking at this map and was thinking 'well I should be able to get through here and I can't'.
> Yes, I've been lost in the Wall a couple of times. And once you are in it, you can't see anyth ing but the Wall, so it's … you know what I mean?
> I: Definitely. I'm pleased I don't live in the wall. I was really lucky to get my flat. Really lucky because it's a really nice flat.
> I: You prefer not to live in the Wall then?
> Because it's a bit closed in for me. I like where I am because I've got big windows and I look out both sides onto the grass, prefer not seeing the Wall.
> (Kim, 35, Byker)

3.8 Regeneration policies often allude to and celebrate a specific aesthetics of place as having a cultural and economic value, embodied too by users able to *pass through* space: but again such economies of use discord with residents' experiences of inhabiting – rather than viewing – The Wall and the Byker estate which it surrounds.

3.9 A similar discord and disorientation was experienced in pulling up outside of the rural community group to conduct a focus group with young working-class women. High metal fences, with menacing forked tongues on the top of each bar were used to enclose this 'youth space', keeping outsiders out (or dangerous insiders in). It was not a particularly inviting place and, with its concrete, grey walls and brown paneling, windows smashed and taped up, felt very different from centralized and safe University space, where we had disseminated to 'users'. Nonetheless, our presence was welcomed with surprise and the youth worker greeted with a 'thanks for coming over to see the girls, they don't get many people interested in what they have to say. The boys, over there, they're already speaking to that researcher'. The other male researcher had been coming for the past month and came over to introduce himself and wanted to know why we were here (the 'girls' apparently not being 'in crisis'). We walked with the youth worker through the pool room and through to the larger grey room at the back where a group of young women were sat on plastic chairs, backs to us and the rest of the crowd. They were talking avidly and it seemed a shame to interrupt; we asked if any of them would like to talk to us about living in the North East. They seem a bit sceptical at first, perhaps thinking, 'Who are they and what do they want with us, we haven't done anything'. But they agreed and the youth worker suggested his office. It wasn't ideal, there wasn't really anywhere to sit. The other researcher, the one talking to the young men, got the best space.

3.10 We discussed what the area was like, what they did after school, places to hang out and where to avoid. They asked about our ages. 'Really?', they said 'You look about 18!' This expression of being 'young' felt very different than feeling young in the expert user group; even though we were still the very same age in these contrasting spaces these generational dis-connections came to matter in accessing subjects and disseminating results. There, old furniture, pool table and the table tennis space seemed transported across time and place from past youth clubs; as (older) researchers we were amazed they still looked the same. The young women talked about drinking at the weekend, telling us privileged information, which could be read as 'trouble' and 'failure' by users in another space. Such moments of feeling in and out of place were apparent throughout the fieldwork, causing reflection on who and what travels between spaces: the academic researcher, now recast as community engager, or as tourist raises difficulties in 'listening' where other embodied sensations evoke proximity and distance in being present and 'public'.

Moving through the shadows?

4.1 As part of our fieldwork, we took part in a city tour advertised as 'Shadow Spaces', a tour not overly publicised and circulated via email. Our preconceptions of this trip were that we would be going on a historical tour of Newcastle. We felt intrigued by the possibility of participating in a 'new' experience of Newcastle's supposed 'shadow spaces' with one of the researchers having lived there all her life and the other having lived there for five years. Would these 'new' experiences surprise; would 'outsiders' from the region be able to show us anything new about the city? As residents of the area we felt a degree of defensiveness about what new knowledge these 'travelling tour guides' could impart about the area – we were surprised that the city guides did not themselves live in the North East but could nonetheless tell us about the 'right' way to see things and were transporting themselves across other cities to tell of their uses (the 'alternative' city/site becomes usable). Such investments, presences and absences framed how we then experienced the rest of the urban 'journey'…:

4.2 It was a typical grey day in Newcastle, a light drizzle of rain was falling. A crowd began to gather on the large roundabout where the residential-leisure complex 'Bar 55 degrees North' and Metro Radio are

situated. This space is gentrified and disconnected from the rest of the city, where the sole purpose is to consume or go into a stack of professional apartments. People formed as an excited, eclectic group – they were all waiting for the main event and the ripple of tension buzzing between excited clusters indicated that nobody really knew what was going on. There were no signs that an 'experience' was about to take place. Everyone was waiting, but for what? The tour guide seemed to materialise from nowhere and we were off, promised a tour of the city in a way we had never seen, sensed, felt or touched before. People jostled to the front, wanting to be first. We hung back. Here were a bunch of people who had never met before all talking the tourist chat to each other, bonding as we shuffled into the great unknown. Safety in numbers. Standing in a dark alleyway looking at a dark, damp corner, now recast as a historical 'hidden treasure', we were asked if we could *imagine* what had happened here, we were asked to imagine and feel the other as our own.

4.3 A ripple of excitement went through the crowd as a strange screeching noise pierced the familiar din of traffic noise. People rearranged themselves so they could see over the side of the walkway and below a man was playing the saxophone (not very well). There were 'hmmms' and 'haas' about the oddly placed sound, how it turned our perception of space upside down and back to front. The noise was not good and went on for about ten minutes. We watched what other people were doing, unsure where to put ourselves, as there were the wistful looks into the sky. In looking around came the realisation that we were being filmed and were suitably mortified: we'd seen lots of places like this before, the council estate where we now intruded upon, with none of it being 'exotic' 'strange' or 'shadow' to us. And people live here. Someone opened their window from the flat on the 9th floor to see what all the fuss was about; they even took a photo of us. Them watching us, watching them.

4.4 So the guide in the know talked about ebbs and flows, walking where you want to go, not where you need to go, 'mix it up a bit', was his advice. Experience something new. Collect it, reflect on it, discover what it means and then store it, just in case you need to talk about it as 'your' experience. The rain eased off a little and we marched through the everyday city, into the shadow spaces once more, 'Watch for the puddles' they said, 'don't get dirty'. We went into a car park. Let's observe: There's the big 'no entry' signs, 'What do we all think about that?' This is nothing new, we are seeing the city in the same way, yet they think they are showing us something novel. Has our experience started yet or is it just on hold until we get to the next place, where we'll no doubt stop, poised to think? We move on, not talking. It's about what they can tell us. We go under the motorway where the wire grid fence has been pulled down. This is where homeless people live; this is their space, and we're not invited. 'Look', he says, 'Someone sleeps here, there's his bed. There's been a fire too'. People point at the bottles, look for needles. There's that saxophone noise again, he's making everyone follow him through the bushes to the little clearing, he stops and climbs onto the rock over there. The group breaks apart into contemplation clusters again. We are supposed to be absorbing the 'alternative' and appreciating that so-called 'no-go' spaces can make us feel uncomfortable as we acquire the lives of others as touristic experiences of place.

4.5 In asking what 'travels' we are not seeking to abandon use, the city or its publics - we all carry such physical and mental maps with us as a common referents, facilitating the thinking of, feelings about, and activities in space that blend images, emotions and meanings. But these same feelings, practices and knowledges also constitute blockages – where the 'expert' researcher can also perform the streetwise subjects: 'The wise subject, the one who knows where and where not to walk, how and how not to move, who and who not to talk to, has an expertise that can be understood as both bodily and cultural capital' (Ahmed, 2000: 34). Notions of a 'public sociology' force attention towards what it means to walk through these places politically, and what 'use' these 'travels' have for different researchers and audiences who may be (dis)engaged by the noise – think saxophone – of a 'city publics'. In re-engaging the senses (and a sense of sociology) researchers have a responsibility to re-think who they talk to, walk beside and travel with. Moving through the shadows could then mean developing a social democratic 'impact', defined and done through different approaches, rather than an exclusive neo-liberal measure. Researchers do indeed bear responsibility to articulate findings: ours lay in highlighting enduring classed and gendered inequalities; the regeneration narrative that the project contests is suggestive of alternative policies, geographies and sociologies that do not stigmatise or sensationalise less powerful social groups (Back, 2007).

Conclusion

5.1 This article raised questions about who becomes the proper subject for (non)academic attention in a time when 'city publics' might be positioned as democratising and open or, conversely, as curtailed and shaped through specific and pre-determined economies of value and use. The broader research project demonstrates more fully how change impacts on feelings of belonging, in moving through or being left behind in place; these processes are themselves landscaped in research and professional reaches and interventions. Here, classed and gendered revisions *and* persistences were discussed in relation to the particular fieldwork as producing methodological as well as theoretical concerns, in terms of activating 'city publics' and practicing (or failing) 'public sociology'. Our moves forward, into and through the spaces of access, use, knowledge and value have been troubled but we are cautious not to place trouble with us, as residing in our research (in)capacities: our troubles have been evoked to resituate a more sensory, embodied and politicised 'public sociology' which attends to the differences in listening and in measuring and evaluating those unequal 'voices'. Our concerns were related to the (in)accessibility of research practices, audiences, users and communities, where women have been held up as new entrants into 'feminised' publics, even as gender equality is not achieved – and is in fact re-inscribed in everyday/research evaluations (think 'teenage mothers', overly 'young' researchers). In a time of vast public sector cut-backs, differently impacting on different communities, the 'measure' of this comes to really matter; the quest for culture and 'liveability' positions the middle-classes as active and responsible, where researchers (and universities) can become complicit in these logics of celebrating (regional) 'success' and highlighting good research stories as 'impacts'. It seems worth remembering that 'public sociology' can contribute to processes of inclusion or exclusion (Burawoy, 2005; Back, 2007, Skeggs,

2004), depending on how knowledge is accessed, analysed, interpreted, delivered and used in and beyond the walls of academia – this remains true even when we invite 'users' in as part of a dialogue.

Notes

[1] ESRC RES-000-22-2150. We would like to thank the ESRC for funding this project. Michelle Addison was employed as a Research Assistant on the project for 12 months and Yvette Taylor as PI for 24 months.

[2] The North East still performs relatively poorly compared to other UK regions, even as much is made of its up and coming increasing potential (before and during the global economic downturn) ((http://www.nerip.com/ stateoftheregion/). As documented by the National Statistics Office, the region's population was nearly 2.6 million in 2009 (5% of the population of England). In the period 2001-2009, the population of England grew by 4.8% with the North East showing 1.7% growth, the lowest growth of all English regions. In terms of life expectancy rate, the North East is lower than average, with a higher than average imbalance between elderly and younger residents: People over state pension age (65 and over for men and 60 and over for women) in the North East in 2008 made up 20.1% of the population, compared with 17.9 % for the under-16s. This compares with averages for the UK of 19.2 % and 18.8% respectively. In the North East, men aged 65 in 2006-08 could expect to live another 16.7 years and women 19.3 years, compared with 17.5 and 20.2 years in the UK as a whole. The ex-mining town of Easington Colliery, for example, is known to come very high in rankings of multiple deprivation, with low average incomes and wages. In terms of education, employment and income the North East ranks lower than average UK figures: 44.9% of pupils achieved five or more grades A*-C at GCSE level or equivalent in 2007/08, compared with 47.7% for the UK as a whole. In the midst of the economic downturn, the unemployment rate in the North East stood at 9.3% in the fourth quarter of 2009, higher than the UK rate of 7.8%, with the proportion of children living in 'workless households' in the second quarter of 2009 higher in the North East (21%) than the England average (17%).

[3]'One North East believes the biggest asset of the region is its people. This is a region where exceptional creativity and innovation takes place. The North East has a tradition for creating brilliant ideas. It is a region whose people are imaginative, resourceful and ready to face the challenges of the future' (http://www.onenortheast.co.uk/page/ index.cfm).

[4] The user group encompassed organisations with cultural, social and economic interests in the North East and included, for example, Voluntary Organisations Network in the North East (VONNE); North East Research Information Partnership; OneNorthEast ; Culture North East; City Councils etc.

[5] English Heritage have preserved the structure of the estate as a national treasure, with the area awarded Grade II Heritage Status due to the strong design statement made by Ralph Erskine in the early 1970s.

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