Disparitá di sicurezza ontologica e senso di luogo tra due quartieri a Newcastle upon Tyne

Disparity of ontological security and sense of place between two neighbourhoods in Newcastle upon Tyne.

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Absatract. Mescolando architettura, psicologia e storia urbana, l'articolo affronta la demolizione da una prospettiva critica alla luce della continua privatizzazione dello spazio urbano e della relegazione delle voci dei residenti di fronte alla trasformazione urbana. Comprendendo l'erosione dell'ambiente familiare attraverso lo sviluppo urbano come uno smantellamento dei legami comunitari fortemente dipendenti dalla classe, vengono messi a confronto gli esempi di Shieldfield e Heaton, due quartieri di Newcastle upon Tyne, nel Regno Unito, che dimostrano approcci radicalmente diversi alla trasformazione urbana residenziale. Le misure di sicurezza ontologica e di senso del luogo sono utilizzate per distinguere dove il concetto di demolizione diverge nella mente dei residenti, data la crescente pressione della studentificazione in un quartiere e della gentrificazione nell'altro. La prospettiva residenziale sulla demolizione mostra un profondo bisogno di senso di appartenenza e di controllo, mentre la proprietà collettiva della comunità emerge come una potenziale soluzione.

Abstract. *Blending architecture, social psychology and urban history, the article approaches demolition from a critical perspective in the light of the ongoing privatisation of urban space and the sidelining of resident voices in the face of urban transformation. Understanding the erosion of familiar environments through urban development as a highly class-dependent dismantling of community ties, the examples of Shieldfield and Heaton are compared, two adjacent neighbourhoods in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK that display radically different approaches to urban residential transformation. Measures of ontological security and sense of place are employed to distinguish the points at which the concept of demolition diverges in the minds of the residents, given the increasing pressures of studentification in one neighbourhood and gentrification in the other. The resident perspective on demolition shows a deep need for a sense of belonging and control, with community ownership emerging as a potential solution.*

***Keywords**: Neighbourhood, Sense of place, Demolition, Participative planning, Community ownership*

Introduction

Cities are so frequently characterised as sites of constant transformation and dynamism that we rarely take stock of the value of continuity and preservation in urban communities. While discourse around urban development concerns itself with material change – what to build, and how much of it – a critical approach is called for in evaluating the forms and consequences of that change, specifically of demolition. Demolition as a mainstream practice of urban transformation has symbolic connotations – the erasure of the old, to simply remove a specific space, or to replace it with a new one, but this selective nature represents a deep inequality in the extent to which residents can engage with, shape, and enjoy their spaces. Demolition requires significant capital investment, years of engagement with the planning system and detailed economic plans proving the assurance of returns on such an undertaking – exclusive criteria rendering demolition a tool wielded by a select few. In this study, working with communities in Newcastle upon Tyne, and with the support of Dwellbeing Shieldfield, a local residents cooperative, the processes of class reinforcement that demolition entrenches in post-industrial capitalist society are brought to light, and a critical evaluation of mainstream urban development in terms of architectural turnover is presented.

Through a multi-phased project based on resident perceptions of demolition, the study operates outside of the mainstream planning discourse of "growth for the sake of growth", taking the neighbourhood as a functional unit of urban society and prioritising community resilience and wellbeing. A series of semi-structured interviews and a focus group were employed to develop a detailed understanding of how two neighbourhoods with radically different histories of construction and demolition interpretated the processes. Fundamental to the framework of the study are sense of place (SoP) and ontological security (OS), concepts adopted in some architectural studies relating to construction, but absent from discussion around demolition. *The study hypotheses are thus, that perceptions of urban development and regeneration, in the form of demolition and construction, differs between residents of Heaton and of Shieldfield, and this differing significance has an effect on the sense of place of those residents, in the context of ontological security.*

SoP as a conceptual tool to understand the relationship between and individual and their environment offers an opportunity to encourage reflection on aspects of one's habitat that are rarely taken critically, and to use these reflections to identify nuanced ways in which the built environment shapes and is shaped by human interactions. SoP, developed initially from behavioural and environmental psychology, functions as a "subidentity" of the self, a constituent part of the self that can be studied discretely, through which the myriad of

lived experiences around a body are filtered, consciously and unconsciously, into a place identity (Proshansky 1978). Vaske and Kobrin (2001) in a study of environmentally responsible behaviour, declare SoP as comprised of two elements, *place identity*, signifying emotional attachments, and *place dependence*, the more functional aspect of the territory to meet practical needs. This multidimensional approach to the different components is taken further with Jorgensen et al, whose empirical framework included the two aforementioned elements, as well as *place attachment* (Jorgensen et al. 2001). For them, *place identity* is linked more to the space as a reflection of the community and viceversa, the extent to which the identity of the individual can be expressed and reaffirmed in the space – *place attachment* for Jorgensen and Stedman then takes the role of emotional connection.

Under transient relationships to place, the upheaval of urban regeneration and related changing uses of buildings, OS appears as a crucial aspect of resident life. Giddens defines OS as the 'confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of their social and material environments of action' (Giddens, 1990: 92) – a psychological term intimately connected to the built environment. OS is the assurance of an enduring and lasting feeling of protection, in the form of a space or a community functioning as "a coping mechanism against existential anxiety" and the threat of impermanence. Through OS the home takes on the significance of safety, a reliable and 'protective cocoon' (Giddens, 1991: 40) as a defence against change and loss. Hiscock et al. (2001) state "any sense of stability, continuity and confidence in the achievement of self-realisation is shaken and made less certain in the contemporary circumstances which now prevail over many communities, towns and cities," and the extreme inequality within modern urban developments, which target different geographic areas in a mosaic of segregated processes, only strengthens this instability (Hiscock et al. 2001: 52). Modern planning policies prioritise growth, "hailing restlessness as a positive virtue," and with residents often excluded from planning decisions affecting their buildings, the question of OS is intimately linked to SoP and to changes in building use (Beauregard 1996).

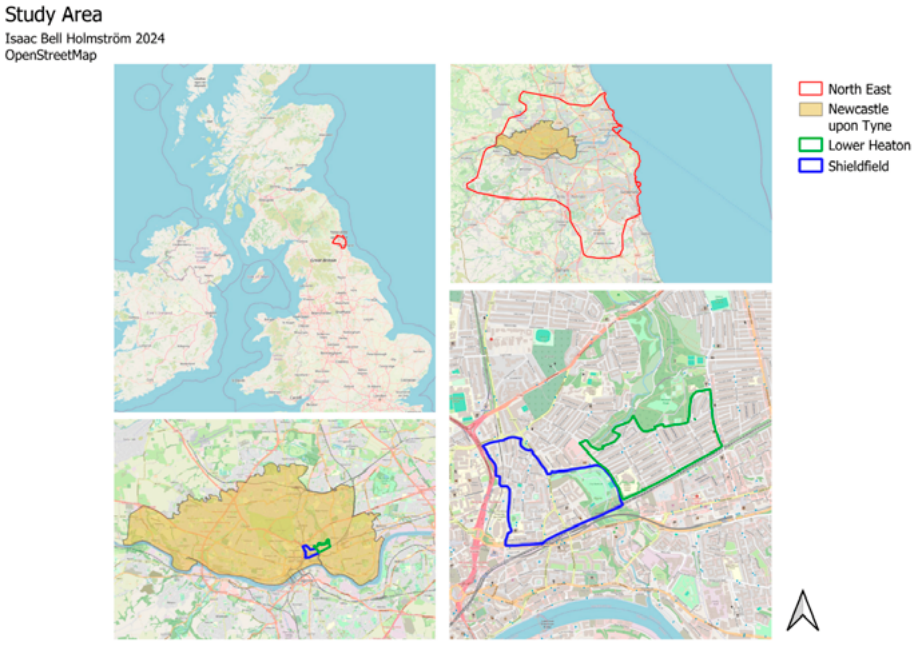
Grenville's argument that conversation movements are driven by a desire for OS is crucial here – "social dislocation is exacerbated by the absence or loss of familiar buildings – to be distressed is unpleasant, but to be distressed and lost in unfamiliar surroundings is worse," (Grenville 2007). For Grenville, opposition to development-based demolition is an expression of the need to retain familiar spaces "as a bulwark against a transient and untrustworthy external world." The impact the built environment has on SoP, on activities and communities, encouraged or discouraged patterns of behaviour, mean that in times of stress, resistance to architectural change rises. Understanding the vul-

nerability of residents within areas targeted by regeneration, SoP can provide an indicator of OS, an attachment to a space and a trust that it will endure, specifically a space offering an emotional bond that reaffirms one's identity.

The extent that architectural turnover and urban transformations affect different social groups in different ways is thus of great importance to policymakers and urban planners, should such concepts as SoP and OS within one's neighbourhood be sincerely acknowledged as factors of value. As Mouratidis (2021) notes, wellbeing is growing in significance within architectural circles, notably in RIBA's requalification of the definition as a factor of social value, freedom, flexibility and positivity, but while emerging algorithmic tools such as HACT seek to quantify and financially rank such interventions, this study seeks to valorise the approach through a more anthropological lens (RIBA, 2020).

2. Context

Figure 1 Study area



The study focused on two neighbourhoods in Newcastle upon Tyne – Shieldfield, and Lower Heaton, hereafter "Heaton". Newcastle owes its rise to the Great Northern Coalfield, and the River Tyne, allowing it to supply the world

with coal for centuries, developing strong sectors of shipbuilding and engineering. Deindustrialisation, mass unemployment and abandoned infrastructure and worksites, were felt strongly, and left Newcastle with a confused mix of industrial architecture and mass housing as it searched for new economic prospects (Heslop et al. 2023: 924). Rising university tuition fees, and the dominance of high-mobility delocalised finance and investment in the international economy, has fuelled the city's capitalisation on its two universities, Newcastle and Northumbria, to promote its position within the "knowledge economy," competing for ranking positions, numbers of students, and campus experiences (Benneworth 2008: 90). As such, after the 2008 crash, a significant wave of investment rushed to purpose-built student accommodation, PBSA, often following a similar style of high-rise blocks, emphasising verticality, neglecting decoration, and demarcated from the street by reception centres, fences and gates (Heslop et al. 2023).

Heaton is a primarily residential neighbourhood east of the city centre, typified by brick terraced houses in regular repeating streets, largely built around the 1800s to support the Heaton Coal Mine. The neighbourhood is bounded at its edges by main roads and the railway. For the purposes of the research, lower Heaton was taken as the study area, from Heaton Park to the north, the City Stadium, another park, to the east, the railway line to the south, and Heaton Road to the west. Within this territory, hereafter referred to as Heaton, the local primary school plays a major role, with Heaton Park and easy walking, driving, and public transport connections to the city centre and further afield.

Facing the city stadium, a volumetric and horizontal office block, a block of flats, and a raised courtyard block, make up Shieldfield's border with Heaton and the City Stadium. The southern edge of the neighbourhood leads to the Ouseburn Valley, an area undergoing intense gentrification due to cultural relevance and vicinity to the Tyne, the north leads to the residential area of Jesmond, while the west leads to a modern Northumbria University campus building, and the city centre. As such, Shieldfield is often used as a thoroughfare by Heaton residents. Shieldfield contains a vast range of architectural forms and tenures, from tower blocks to lower-density social housing complexes, single-family terraced streets and luxury PBSA – decades of construction and demolition have left a rich diversity compared to Heaton's dominance of terraced streets, but one still overshadowed by PBSA.

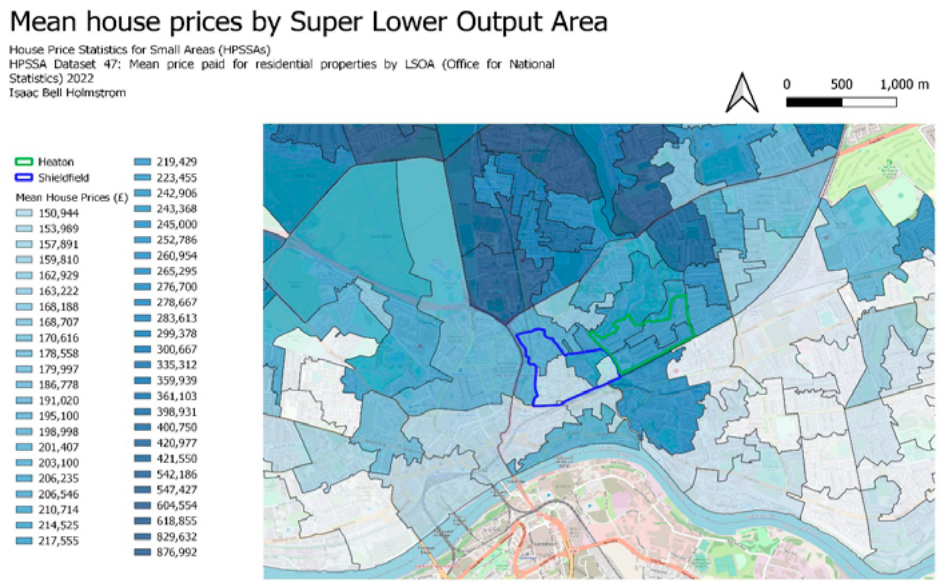
3. Spatial analysis

Structural factors operating across neighbourhood boundaries contextualise the social dynamics, shown through the Super Lower Output Area (SLOA),

the most precise unit of national statistical measurement. While Heaton is comfortably represented by this unit, Shieldfield is instead divided by two different SLOAs, one including Byker, and one including Sandyford, neighbourhoods with very different characteristics, land prices, reputations, and histories - such analysis is nonetheless helpful for understanding city-wide trends affecting construction and demolition.

3.1. House Prices

Figure 2



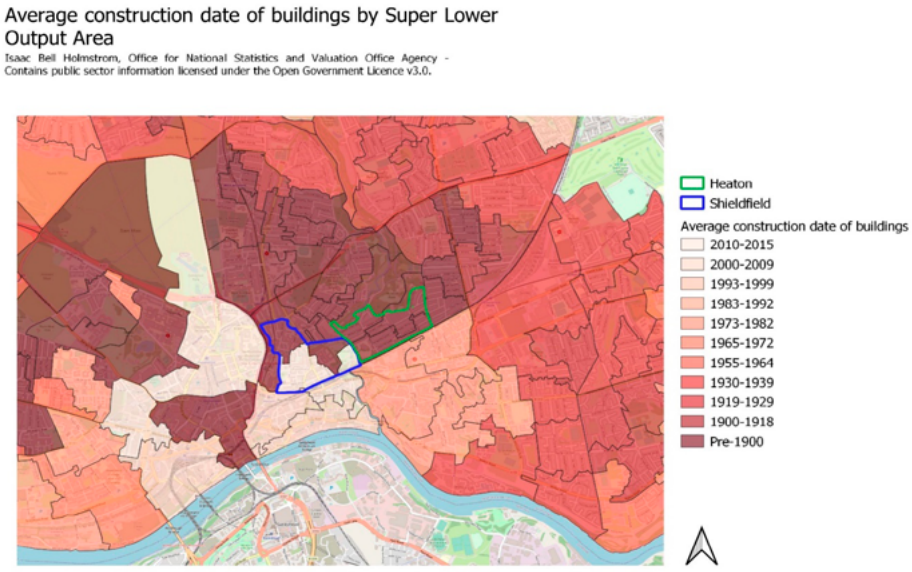
Thomsen et al. (2011) argue key factors in encouraging residential demolition are land and house prices. With heavy concentration of low-value homes, we would expect renovation, regeneration and demolition, like the infamous Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder projects in Scotswood and Walker, two neighbourhoods of Newcastle, in 2002, scheduling 6600 low-value dwellings for demolition under the "Going for Growth" policy (Park and Sohn, 2013). This explicitly focused on replacing certain forms of accommodation with more typically middle-class homes, "'rebalancing' the population of unpopular neighbourhoods through an engineered gentrification process." (Cameron 2006: 9).

Categorising SLOAs by mean house price in 2022, we see the darker area of Heaton is part of a group of SLOAs with similar prices, curving around the

centre, dividing much lower prices in the east from much higher in the north. The juxtaposition of Shieldfield/Heaton is clear, a dividing line isolating the small area to the east of the centre as one of notably low prices, somewhat anomalous but explained by recent developments in Shieldfield.

3.2. Building Age

Figure 3



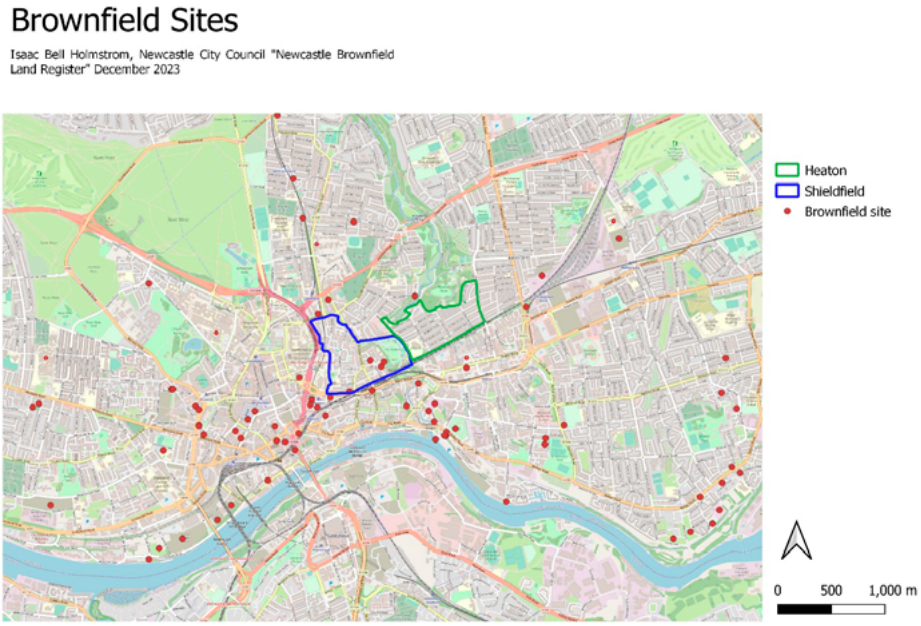
Building age is a contentious indicator of vulnerability to demolition, and must be examined alongside tenure and building form. As Cherchi notes, the architectural heritage found in older buildings must be protected, preserved for the future (Cherchi, 2015). But this form of conservation is tied to aesthetics – age can alternatively act in favour of demolition, with older buildings no longer serving the area, demolition becoming a form of "surgery as a result of which infected tissue is removed to help the organism, in our case a city, to recover." (Kaczmarek, 2019).

An examination of average construction dates of buildings by SLOA recalls the previous map. Where the majority of homes in Heaton, and Jesmond to the north, are historic terraced streets built for miners and their families, the relative newness of Shieldfield buildings are comparable to the centre, where almost constant building turnover results in shopping centres, offices and restaurants. Based on changes to Shieldfield over recent decades, (Heslop et

al. 2023) we can understand high turnover of buildings as an unstable process, likely anticipating further development.

3.3 Brownfield Sites

Figure 4



Understanding the current urban development geography is necessary to consider future possibilities. As such, a map of brownfield sites on the City Council Brownfield Register offers insights into the distribution of construction and development. A brownfield site does not signify active development, only a cleared plot of land, without indication of the length of time the space has been vacant for, but is still useful in understanding larger trends around Heaton and Shieldfield.

Most obvious is the consistent sequence of brownfield sites following the River Tyne, fitting with the concept of the "waterfront", a site of economic activity contributing to a city's competitive attractiveness (Falk, 2002). The curve of the sequence of brownfield diverges from the river as it reaches the city centre, and returns to the water passing straight through Shieldfield, a testament both to its centrality to regeneration possibilities, and vulnerability to investment. Heaton is ignored; not indicating lack of development, renovation, or business turnover, but a lack of abandoned sites, of empty spaces. The

empty space is often idealised as "necessary for urban renovation. In these empty lots the city reinvents itself; they are playgrounds of urbanistic innovation and cultural breeding grounds." (Nefs, 2006: 50). While they can represent possibility, and the ambiguity of the future use of the space can be a positive attribute, power dynamics and landownership arrive to complicate the matter. Empty spaces, held vacant for years despite community desire to utilise them, permeate Shieldfield. With strong histories both of local community artwork projects and capital-intense land exploitation by multinational investment, the ownership of the space is contested. The ambiguity of these spaces represent significant potential for different groups, but their interests do not necessarily overlap.

4. Identity

A point to note is the identity of the researcher. Identity "reflects the position the researcher has chosen to adopt within a given research study" - thus relevant for a work tied to the personal motivations and feelings of the researcher (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013: 71)

Kusow (2003: 596) notes that "ontologically, the insider perspective is usually referred to as an *emic* account while the outsider perspective as an *etic* one"; as such there is a strong etic emphasis, particularly in interviews. While an etic position assumes that "objective knowledge relies on the degree to which researchers can detach themselves from the prejudices of the social groups they study," the researcher acknowledges personal characteristics affecting research data and conclusions. While being a native speaker of English could have contributed to a level of distance from non-native speakers encountered during data collection, being a local allowed understanding both the local dialect and the highly localised geography discussed in interviews. A member of Dwellbeing Shieldfield, with whom the study was conducted, being familiar with the streets in question, without map references required facilitated the natural flow of conversation regarding specific sites around and outside the neighbourhoods.

The study is not ethnographical, but as a Heaton resident, the researcher must draw attention to factors influencing human relations involved in data collection, essential for understanding respondents, and future replication. Six months after concluding the project, the author published the findings in an accessible pamphlet co-designed with Shieldfield residents to maintain open public discourse, and to keep the debate alive, contributing directly to local activism.

5. Methodology

Field research was designed to valorise the subjective perceptions of residents in terms of the present, past, and future of their area. A series of semi-structured interviews discussing community feeling and local history, with reference to architecture and demolition, was followed by a focus group held with interview participants to explore potential changes to the built environment driven by residents.

The purpose of the study is to engage with SoP and OS, following the social psychology approach identified by Stedman (2016). This is a complicated issue, requiring sensitive treatment – "obviously, sense of place is one of the most abstract and illusive concepts … understanding what creates a true sense of place … is a complex task" (Barker, 1979:162). The concepts of place attachment, place dependence, place identity, and OS, require examination in their own rights, to build a clearer picture of at which point the experiences of residents diverge. Seaman's argument (2013) is very convincing, a precise, accurate scientific measurement is impossible - to focus on quantifying such deeply personal experiences is a misplaced use of energy.

Relph advises to study SoP "by examining the links between place and the phenomenological foundations of geography," and thus an acceptance of the unquantifiable, the impressionistic and the subjective, is necessary for resident engaging with in such a study (Relph, 1976: 4). Hawkins and Maurer acknowledge the limitations of quantitative analysis in such environments – "when these experiences occurred, participants might have been under heavy stress; their memories may be fallible or their perceptions skewed … the importance of these findings is the sense participants make of their experiences rather than the actual facts of a particular event" (Hawkins and Maurer 2011: 150).

Following an example set by Hiscock et al, combining consecutively quantitative and qualitative methods allows candidate selection for in-depth interviews, strengthening qualitative analysis through maintaining diversity and balance in viewpoints presented (Hiscock et. al. 2001). A focus group was chosen as a complementary method of research collection to engage with the themes identified the interviews, to reach "a depth of understanding as the back-and-forth exchange of ideas in the group encourages exploration of areas of agreement and disagreement that enrich the resultant focus group results" (Baum, 2021: 87)

Ethical considerations focused on treatment of residents – particularly in Shieldfield, there is a perceived tendency of students to disrespect residents, or to treat them as "guinea pigs" in their own research projects. By clear wording of the possibility of this study to bring up traumatic memories or

fears in participants, empathetic and sensitive treatment of their words, the main issue Dwellbeing Shieldfield had regarding ethical considerations was addressed – that residents would be collectively encouraged to fear imminent demolition without directing these feelings to something productive. Thus, the focus group was oriented towards collective solutions and consensus-building with the view towards positive perspectives – building preservation, community ownership, and participative decision-making.

5.1. Interviews

Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted, with ten Heaton residents and ten Shieldfield residents, chosen through snowball sampling to maintain a level of trust with interviewees, despite the obvious limits - including were two people who living outside the neighbourhood but working and volunteeingr within Shieldfield, justified based on their long and rich experiences. The audio was recorded, and discussions focused on themes of memory, local buildings, community, demolition, and collective voice, looking at past trends and examinations of the present. Conversations varied significantly between respondents - diversity of race, sex, immigration status, employment and age were all strong factors in maintaining a plurality of viewpoints. Participants were anonymised and assigned references under neighbourhood of residence, or for small business owners, neighbourhood of work.

5.2. Focus group

Initially, Shielfield's needs were discussed, after recognising that the participants were not fully representative of the neighbourhood. Using simple materials, participants were encouraged to collectively identify "needs" of the space, not of individuals or buildings, but the whole community.

The next discussion phases focused on specific sites identified in interviews as vulnerable to urban transformation, likely demolition. As identified by participants, the likelihood of demolition in these cases cannot be guaranteed, depending on many unknown factors. Ambiguous plans for development, low municipal budgets, student housing oversaturation and resident housing shortages, gave participants cause to question the possible demolitions in Shieldfield. This study indicates that while demolition is possible, and should not be ruled out, a factor of considerable importance remains the *perception* of future demolition, regardless of the actual occurrence. The local understanding that a space is temporary and impermanent limits the confidence one can build in a future lifestyle including this space. Lack of belief in the endurance

of an important building, even one's own home, represents an instability of SoP best understood through OS.

The sites chosen were the PBSA blocks at Portland Green and the Shield, and the Shieldfield Centre, a community centre, part of a complex including Stoddart House and Shieldfield House, primarily low-income resident housing blocks. Interviewees who indicated these spaces often confused these buildings, and appeared to see little distinction between one PBSA block and the next, and between Stoddart House and the Shieldfield Centre, perceived as homogenous and undifferentiated. Focus group participants spent fifteen minutes, in pairs, focusing on each site, using post-it notes to stick suggestions onto the images of the buildings. These were short-term modifications of the spaces to meet the needs previously identified, methods of adapting the buildings in ways to serve the community, explicitly ruling out demolition. From these restrictions, the conversations about spatial use moved towards ownership.

Ultimately, these steps were followed by a final summary discussion to share insights and suggestions for the future. More focus groups, examining other sites and including other participants, would be fruitful, but due to limited resources were not possible. This focus group only included participants from Shieldfield – to undertake similar focus groups in Heaton would be preferable, but it was judged more beneficial to undertake one with Shieldfield residents given the much higher potential demolition in this area, granting more priority to communally-formed proposals for building use.

6. Interviews

Neighbourhoods

Heaton residents had a reasonably homogenous perception of their own neighbourhood. The study area of South Heaton, specifically, was seen as a community bounded by urban geography and social class. Former social housing stock had been sold off and many students now lived in purpose-built accommodation outside the area, so Heaton was now seen as largely middle class, 'arty', 'desirable' and gentrified, characterised by privately-owned housing, rising house prices, and independent specialist shops.

By contrast, Shieldfield residents were aware of their area as 'unpopular'. Its boundaries are permeable; a place where pedestrians pass through, a "place between" (Shieldfield:7) geographically and "passed over" (Shieldfield:8) financially with a lack of investment. Socially, its ready connections to elsewhere foster internal isolation, making it harder for residents to feel a

sense of community with each other. Residents also felt a sense of transience; a significant part of its population being made up of asylum seekers and refugees who might not be staying long in the area, as well as students, again with a very different relationship to place than to permanent residents. Many residents felt pride in the area's diversity and multiculturalism, and that Shieldfield was a welcoming space for new international residents, while also expressing concerns about the student population.

Figure 5 A pedestrianised street in Heaton (Chiara Zannelli 2024)

Figure 6 The Shieldfield Cup, a children's sports event (Chiara Zannelli 2024)

Students and "the University"

Both neighbourhoods have high student numbers, and this has a significant impact on many residents' perceptions of the area and conception of SoP. While in Heaton this takes the form of shared houses, HMOs, rented to students without a distinction in architectural form or frontage, in Shieldfield most students live in PBSA managed by private developers, for use by both Newcastle and Northumbria Universities. Residents interviewed made no distinction between institutions, referring to both as "the University".

"Emotional investment"

There is widespread understanding that students have very few ties to the social environment around them, perceived as a lack of commitment to the neighbourhood itself. Shieldfield:7 was forgiving – "It's a shame students don't get involved in what's happening in community, but if you are only here for a few months, you're getting to know yourself and the people you live with. It's hard to get involved in some community initiatives."

Heaton:3 noted their street WhatsApp group had allowed them to combat student antisocial behaviour – "I think our problem with students peaked quite some time ago. It peaked about 15 years ago." Lack of commitment, along with high student numbers, was a real concern – "there's just so many, and, they didn't have any emotional investment."

"Two distinct areas"

There is an overwhelming sense of segregation between the student populations and the residents, with few attempts to integrate these isolated groups. Crucially, the growing PBSA dominance and the student population, without the input of the local residents, was the catalyst for local community projects in Shieldfield. Shieldfield:7 – "I think students being here has had a more positive effect – without the students coming here, and having something for people to live with, something to react against, they probably wouldn't have felt the need of a collective voice and things like this, [Dwellbeing] probably wouldn't be her."

But this sense of conflict, two separate communities within Shieldfield, is tangible – "I see two distinct areas, neighbourhoods, between the residential and the student accommodations. We can't even count the accommodation as a residential area, in terms of the lifestyle or the peoples, the residence length, it's not the same. (Shieldfield:1)"

Figure 7 Portland Green, a student "village". Note the (absence of) decoration and frontage. (Author, 2024)

Shieldfield:10 felt "They made Shieldfield a student place, and now we are stuck living between each other, but they just come for a moment then leave, they don't see Shieldfield as a home, they don't see the beauty – I think students take a community for granted, they don't realise what has gone into making a location into a nice place, all the work behind a community."

"They just kept building more"

The sense of threat perceived by Shieldfield:7 is shared by many, and the University is understood as an expanding force dominating the built environment. PBSA dominance is the most evident form of expansion perceived by residents – "when the student housing projects began, it was the re-use of some buildings, and that made sense, to repurpose some abandoned buildings, but one after the other, they just kept building more, until people were surrounded." (Shieldfield:3)

Shieldfield:7 saw dissatisfaction with investment in Shieldfield, coupled with heavy investment in PBSA, as the source of resentment towards the university. "I think it's a bit of a shame what hasn't come with the influx of students, it really hasn't brought any income to the area."

Developers and the Council

Figure 8 Private property in Heaton (Chiara Zannelli 2024)

"Builders and planners just do what they can get away with in the end"

This confusion is part of a wider atmosphere of exclusion and obscurity regarding Council decisions and municipal operations. Many argued these decisions and actions were illogical, confusing, senseless.

Shielfield:8 expressed this uncertainty in terms of the future – "I really don't know what's happening in the Council in the background. Are they thinking let's flatten Shieldfield and start again, or part of Shieldfield and sell the land? I have no idea what's behind those doors in the council … it had the community ripped out, and locked into flats."

Shieldfield:1 described scheduled demolition and construction works as an intrusive and confusing process– "suddenly some construction company comes in, builds all the fences and start to do something and sometimes leaves it, you don't know what's happening. You need to look at the website, and it's not a clear website. You need to find the letter of about the decision, from the Council members, trying to find that document, if that will happen." Heaton:6 saw the planning system as opportunist, not properly considered.

"Builders and planners just do what they can get away with in the end. I don't know. It doesn't really make sense."

"It shouldn't be that sort of power balance"

What underlies both the dissatisfaction with cuts to public services and the perceptions of obscurity, lack of communication and of transparency, is an unequal power dynamic many residents feel is unproductive.

Shieldfield:1 saw a tangible conflict between vulnerable communities and developers, with radically different perceptions of the space, and Shieldfield as the battleground. "Probably [developers] will try to use every opportunity they can have, in terms of, you know, finding land and developing a new project, it's just the area is very vulnerable. Local people having low income, immigrants, asylum seekers, many families with many children. Most of them don't know how to protect their rights." Heaton:10 saw issues in the fundamental ways that local government perceived communities – "particularly if we're dealing with change, we need to ask how much the people running those processes, whether they have the skills to understand how communities change, but also whether they've got foresight to say we either deal with this now, or create community tensions in the future'."

Shieldfield:8 had a similar approach to rethinking the Council approach towards business assets – "Community asset transfer should be a big part of this, the ownership – we've asked to buy this property and the council keeps saying no, but I think by letting the community own the assets, I think we could own this whole street, why not? We've invested £200,000 into this community, more than the council ever has. Communities can lead and make things a lot better, we should be transferring ownership."

The extent to which a community has the right to make changes in their area is contested – a group of residents in Heaton recently set up a website with detailed information on the planning system and the local street design to argue for more road closures – Heaton:10 noted "I worry about fairness. Because I would argue if the process was designed better, it wouldn't be so necessary for individuals to have to set up these initiatives, use that many resource – just to engage in those discussions, everybody's time is so limited and so finite."

In thinking towards the future, Shieldfield:8 agreed: "it shouldn't be just the Council anyway. It shouldn't be that sort of power balance, rather than the people being the ones who has it done to them all time, it needs to be a different approach. I live in hope for the officers in the Council more sympathetic to the community perspective."

Heaton:10 saw the power dynamic as being ingrained, but hoping a more open attitude could be developed. "I also think it's a failure of imagination,

and with all local governments I've been to and worked with, there was a feeling that they would describe it as "their place". And I would strongly argue, to people in local government, they are the visitors in other people's places, and they should act as such, so they should to remember to wipe their shoes at the door, offer to wash the pots. Saying we are the Council, this is our turf, is the wrong attitude."

Urban Transformation, Construction, Demolition

The manifestation of the power dynamics seen from the universities, the Council and the developers, in the built environment, is through demolition and construction, and here we see the impact of such changes on the SoP and OS of the residents.

"Places for people to meet"

Shieldfield:7 immediately identified the need of "more places for people to meet." Heaton:3, talking about local history, mentioned Shieldfield was "a really, really popular place. Everybody wanted a council house there because of the proximity to town, there was 3 bars and a social club". Shieldfield:7 explained the loss of this social club as a betrayal by the Council – "The social club, that was a bit of a grievance. And when there was a bit of discussion about what was going to happen here in terms of building, the bargain was made that, yeah, you can have the student block it so long as you keep the club and they agreed to that. And of course it didn't happen, they pulled it down." The space is now used for student accommodation.

"To brighten it up a bit"

Within the proposed ideas for reviving the spaces around the areas, there are two main themes – re-use of empty structures, and the greening of urban space.

Shieldfield:2 preferred re-use over yet another wave of fresh construction and demolition – "There are empty office buildings near these streets, they have been abandoned for a few years, but why can't they turn those into student accommodations? They would be suited to it, I don't understand why they always focus on new constructions."

Shieldfield:8 saw a lot of opportunity in the 1960s housing estate design around Stoddart House and the Shieldfield Centre. "The architect had a vision…look at it. Its great playground space, there's even a sort of amphitheatre space that's never been used. I think it's the right time to realise the potential. The core elements are great, it just it had a bit of a rough start, it could come back. It would be great to brighten it up a bit."

"Architectural merit"

Revival of the space, as judged aesthetically, has strong links to demolition – the participants offered mixed opinions on the benefits of preserving or replacing specific buildings.

For Heaton:2, demolition was a tool to improve the neighbourhood, to clear up specific unsightly areas. "Where the bingo hall is there, that that street can look a bit messy, … more demolition there would be alright…the baths in town, I would be happy to lose them, it's a grim building…. There's that Shieldfield Centre too, it's a bit of a mess."

Figure 9 The Shieldfield Centre, the frontier of Heaton and Shieldfield (Chiara Zannelli 2024)

Shieldfield:2 lamented the loss of beautiful historic buildings, and feared the aesthetic value of replacements – "you get such lovely buildings pulled down, to replace them with modern buildings that don't really fit with the surroundings, they don't match anymore, and I think it's just a matter of time until they match everything together and there won't be any old ones left. Changes just mean demolition of the whole street, just flattening it, and replacing it with the modern buildings that maybe don't look as nice."

Use value, however, was seen as more important in these cases, the practical value of a home was more significant in preservation. "No one can claim that any of the buildings that have gone up in the last 20 years here have long lasting architectural merit. If they're empty, they could probably come down. But I don't think you can let them come down just because it's a little bit unsightly, if people are living there and it's part of the community. Because beautiful buildings don't make it home, they help if you live there. (Shieldfield:7)"

Figure 10 Shieldfield House, 26 storeys tall (Chiara Zannelli 2024)

"They're more vulnerable than others"

The ways in which selective demolitions and urban changes affect different demographics in different ways, some quite intimately, was also a point of note. Heaton:6 noted "people are much happier to knock down newer buildings, aren't they? So there's an area of Shieldfield and there used to be a care home, and they knocked it down and built housing, and maybe there was more need for housing. But I wasn't aware that there was anything wrong with that building."

Shieldfield:1 also proposed more protections for social housing and tenants in the light of the move towards luxury PBSA – "regulations could be stronger, in terms of protecting the residents. It shouldn't be that easy to just say, "OK, you have to leave". They're not random residents, they are residents of social housing, they're more vulnerable than others". Heaton:1 focused on ambiguity in future developments and doubt that they would serve the community. "If they decided they were building another tower block, I wouldn't be overly impressed, but if they knocked that tower block down, I'd be scared what monstrosity they'd put in its place."

"The literal destruction of place"

The impact of demolition on these residents' SoP is evident. Socially, we see loss of used and enjoyed practical spaces, the relational and social connections dependent on that space, and the recognisable and familiar appearance of the neighbourhood, all of which express the relationship between architecture and SoP.

Shieldfield:9 said "they knocked the heart and soul out of Shieldfield, that's God's honest truth." There are "no pubs, no churches, no nothing" and the pubs have all been turned into student accommodation, "intimidating buildings, all tall and grey, it's scary to go there at night."

Heaton:10 remembered these demolitions: "I … remember having conversations with [Shieldfield residents] as some of the newer developments were happening there. I described that to colleagues in the Council as being similar to topocide. The literal destruction of place. Colleagues talking about regeneration, etcetera, etcetera, I was seeing the community reactions like earthquakes. Literally, you are destroying these spaces"

The impact on social memory, on intimate personal connections, was important to Shieldfield:8 – "what's demolished takes a long time to be rebuilt. The relations, social relations, the comfort you have in the place. A lot of memory comes from physical attributes, memory comes from often seeing someone in your community, so it's quite important for your health to have that sort of database of memory. It helps you orient yourself, helps you remember things when you bump into people readily. So if this all gets disappeared, the re-connections that were built last over the last 5-10 years go again. You can't really replace that very easily."

"Demolition always stays like a question mark"

The ambiguity of future demolition has significant implications for OS felt among Shieldfield residents – an ambiguity absent from Heaton, where all that was predicted was "just renovation,", and that any significant changes would be "not in Heaton, it's more stuff at the borders of Heaton that have de-

velopment. (Heaton:1)" Heaton:7 was also certain of building safety, based on property values of older houses and the outcry that demolition would incite. "Not likely at all, any demolition here, because of the age of the buildings, and because of the desirability – unless they were in really bad nick, I don't think there would be any demolition, people would kick off."

The case is very different in Shieldfield. Shieldfield:4 suggested some of the PBSA itself could be demolished in the future – "they're cheap blocks that could easily come down if they had to," and compared them to other student accommodation buildings in the city that had recently been scheduled for demolition – "there's a lot of uncertainty around what happens to these blocks, they could well be temporary."

Shieldfield:9 reported rumours of demolition of Stoddart House, which have circulated for decades – "there were rumours that Northumbria University wants it for student accommodation, but they would have to demolish it because the few private flats here don't do well at all on the market."

Shieldfield:2 speculated about the future of demolition, with the Shieldfield Centre, which hosts the Newbridge Project, being an option – "There isn't much old or derelict left in Shieldfield, nothing left to go – there have been talks about Newbridge maybe being pulled down, it is the only big old building I can think of." The future contained only more PBSA – "There is an abandoned building behind the student accommodation, which people now use as a car park, maybe they will replace that with another student accommodation."

Shieldfield:1 also suggested the Shieldfield Centre, caveating this by specifying private developers, not the Council. "I think you know, we heard some gossip about the Shieldfield Centre as the next vulnerable building – I don't think the Council will knock it down by themselves and build any social housing there. …. Probably they will try to sell it to some developers, and I think the first thing that comes to my mind is just building another student accommodation." Following this, "all the houses. It's a very small neighbourhood, it's surrounded by highways, from every corner it's started to be eaten by residential units getting more dangerous day by day, especially if they can demolish the Shieldfield Centre. I think the risk will start from there."

Heaton:4 felt similarly about the building, and expressed concern – "So I don't know what's going to happen with the Shieldfield Centre, … and you know you can see when you go around the building, it needs a bit of work, it's such an important building, but that could go."

Shieldfield:1 articulated the impact of the rumours and feeling of uncertainty – "I think not only homeowners, also the renters, they feel scared of these demolitions, they have questions about it. Because eventually it may affect them. This demolition maybe won't stop at that specific land, that they'll

move on, as the housing is very old here. All this student accommodation land, they were many houses like those, and they were knocked down and eventually they may do so here too. I think it has a strong negative impact on the psychology of the residents here. If this demolition always stays like a question mark, unclear what will happen later… Otherwise you don't know the outcome until the construction finishes, in repeated cycles it reinforces this idea."

Collective Voice

In terms of public involvement in discussions over the built environment and expressing residents needs, the power of collective voice was recognised by many, who discussed barriers they felt to this, recognising Dwellbeing Shieldfield as a powerful example of the value of co-operation.

"We have a view, and it should be listened to"

Shieldfield:8 saw strong structural impacts on residents' minds – "It's had no investment, so that's bound to impact the perception of people, they think, you're always going to be passed over." The self-image of residents as having the capacity to act has been eroded. "you're not treated like a human, the base level, what you expect as a tenant, you're not treated that way with your own feelings about where you live and how you interact with them. That's not going to help you feel positive, help your children and positive life chances, your self-perception"

Shieldfield:7 compared this to other neighbourhoods. "I think a lot of people aren't confident to speak up. We're not in in places like Jesmond and Gosford, with people who are more used to voicing opinions. It's being able to articulate things or being certain of someone here to do it on people's behalf. Not only more structures, more individuals who feel of able to voice themselves, and feel that their voice is heard."

> This confidence is almost a luxury. "To be able to say we have rights and we want this and we have a view and it should be listened to, our view and beyond, as a community, that view only comes when certain other basics of life are solved. And you can't do that when you've got too much uncertainty, because your confidence isn't there to do it." (Shieldfield:8)

Heaton:7 identified this when discussing public space maintenance. "People here can kick up a stink to get places maintained, they have the time and wherewithal to do that, they're not on benefits or working three jobs to feed their kids, it's very unequal.

Figure 11 Dwellbeing Shieldfield's Wildflower Meadow
(Chiara Zannelli 2024)

If you're used to getting results, to kicking up a fuss and getting things done, you'll go into these meetings with a very different mindset than if you're used to telling the council again and again that the lift is broken without anything happening "

Heaton:10 saw conflict as the catalyst leading to more action from communities that have been systematically excluded from decision-making: "some neighbourhoods are so multi-generationally being used to being done to. But actually shifting that is really difficult. When you ask people those kinds of questions, they'll tell you what they're fearful of, and there's such an ingrained sense of disconnect and disempowerment."

Shieldfield:7 noted social barriers to participation, naming PBSA as the fight required to bring people into the field. "It's still a place of people who, hit by lot of loneliness, as always, will be in in tower blocks and places where people are put for convenience. … Things were happening which people who lived here didn't have any control over."

In Shieldfield, an emerging collective voice is the residents co-operative, Dwellbeing Shieldfield, which has strong implications for the future of the area. Shieldfield:10 had worked with Dwellbeing for some time, and found it inspirational, with its bonds to the community being its strength. "Dwellbeing has grown like a snowball, that's where our collective voice is, because everyone can say something. I don't know who decided that this part of the city would become the student place, but now we are more united and we can actually talk to the council."

6.1 Analysis

Students

There is a sustained perception that university expansion is profit-seeking, to the detriment of the area. Shieldfield:6 said "building the student accommodations was people just thinking about land and money, not about people – the students are not even treated very well in these buildings." The focus is on economic development at the expense of human relationships, choices made not for the good of the space but for extractive economics. When asked about predictions for any future construction, Shieldfield:2 said "it would be student accommodation, definitely, it's the most profitable for the council. But it doesn't give anything back to the community, maybe it does something for local businesses but students are not so caring, they wouldn't offer to do the shopping for a neighbour." The scale of capital investment in PBSA was widely known, and this fact constricted the imagining of alternative futures in residents minds.

The case is different in Heaton, which lacks PBSA and where the student population is more integrated into the social fabric, if only because they live next to longer-term residents without concierge services dividing them from the neighbourhood. For Heaton residents, noise and litter are valid concerns, but there has been a noticeable decline in intensity since 2009, when many PBSA blocks were constructed in Shieldfield. Residents from both neighbourhoods agreed that Heaton, primarily composed of low-density high-value housing stock, was undergoing a gentrification that, while increasing financial pressure on inhabitants, limited the construction of more high-density accommodations like PBSA.

In the focus group, examining specific sites in Shieldfield given the tensions between the local population and the university students, discussions around the PBSA considered spatial methods of bringing groups together. Food was identified as one method – with young students leaving home, learning how to cook, a community kitchen was proposed as a way to use the existing structure, opening the space to residents. Dwellbeing's current activities around food – the Community Chefs programme, sharing food from different cultures for people in need – fed into this. Another method considered was through tenure – one participant noted that in other student accommodation projects around the world, a mixed-tenure system of students and elderly people has promoted intergenerational connections, and housing elderly residents in need of the supported lifestyles found in PBSA blocks.

Maintenance was an important point, while changes were not proposed to the facades, the prominence of such highly-maintained PBSA, clashing architecturally and aesthetically with residential buildings, emphasise divides in investment and care, lacking in public spaces used by locals. This comparison, the stark divide between two worlds contained within Shieldfield, is a limit to true development, and proposals all focused on removing these, blurring boundaries, and promoting collaboration.

Developers and the Council

These processes are linked with SoP – a perception of a much more powerful entity, with the capacity to undertake enormous material changes in one's neighbourhood without justification, gives a sense of insecurity discussed below. The vulnerability of local groups or local individuals, often helpless in the face of loss of public services, excluded from conversations about space, is tangible, and an indicator of the lack of trust residents have in municipal bodies. Lack of transparency in perceptions of the council is reflected in the confusion of residents, attempting to anticipate future behaviour.

Hope for the future is in recognising assets most important to a community, not to a municipality – profit-seeking construction and demolition from the universities is ultimately permitted by the Council, and when these profits do not manifest themselves in benefits for local people, dissatisfaction is natural. The first point raised in the focus group was the lack of attention from the Council. When observing the amount of litter seen outside the row of shops in which the event took place, the conversation indicated that the responsibility for maintenance was ignored by the municipality, and thus was assumed by residents. The psychological impact was discussed, the "ripple effect" of seeing other residents picking up rubbish – "but you know these are standard things that we shouldn't have to ask for. They should be done automatically… you can't just complain. You've gotta act. You gotta push back."

Urban transformation

The disparity between Heaton and Shieldfield is evident in the certainty with which Heaton residents dismiss the idea of demolition, while at the same time speculating about such works in Shieldfield, while Shieldfield residents live in an atmosphere of ambiguity. Both have suffered loss of important meeting spaces in recent decades, but with economic regeneration in Heaton encourages the small cafes and pubs Shieldfield residents envision. Shieldfield:8 saw this as the central mission of their business in the area – "so much of what I think about as communities has been undermined, destroyed, that interconnectedness between us, to appreciate each other, that we're tolerant of each other, that we recognise that interdependence – because we're between totally dependent as humans – and the mantra of social media and other things is that you're not dependent on anything, you're an isolated being, but that's not how it works."

Rebuilding human connections affected by previous urban transformation, connected to decades of such changes, takes time. The "database of memory" Shieldfield:8 refers to is highly vulnerable when displacement of residents is a tangible threat, and for many participants, rumours of further displacement perpetuate this "question mark". Heaton:10's reference to "topocide" conveys the violence of the history of Shieldfield, the violence of demolition Heaton:7 says "would never happen here".

Regarding the Shieldfield Centre, the question of maintenance became central to conversations during the focus group. The residential building of Shieldfield House has been undergoing heavy renovation, and successive demolition was then seen as unlikely. One resident of the building noted "they're spending an awful lot of money doing it up at the minute, I would be very surprised if that was under threat – maybe under threat to be taken over by private developers though, to turn them into super flats." This question of ownership was recurring, with the tenure of the Newbridge Project, an artistic collective, expiring imminently. The Shieldfield Centre is poorly maintained, with wasteful heat loss, and contains primarily office spaces. Accommodation was proposed for some rooms, for financial viability. Various uses of the space and its vicinity were discussed, with interesting conclusions – given the steep gradient of the wheelchair ramp from the Stoddart Street entrance to Shieldfield, it became apparent some people use the Shieldfield Centre as an access route, using the lift from one entrance to reach the rear, which open up on the main concourse of Wretham Place. More attention was proposed to this, the potentials of signposting and making this function more accessible were discussed. Under current ownership, few changes were expected to meet these needs, and community ownership was discussed as a

powerful way of facilitating the work of Dwellbeing Shieldfield and numerous other local organisations to support residents and facilitate changes. The importance of meeting spaces, support groups, and multicultural collaboration, are met to an extent in the Shieldfield Centre as managed by the Newbridge Project. The potential exists for far greater engagement, should tenure be guaranteed.

The issues around Council politics and investment would be bypassed through community ownership, allowing direct routes to use buildings according to residents rather than financial speculation, potentially addressing lack of transparency. Another point raised was the disconnection between local and municipal interests, comparing the potential unity of the neighbourhood with the lack of trust between Council and resident-based initiatives. "Well, I don't know what other conversations are going on [in the Council] … we just don't know who's actually steering the ship. But yeah, if we if we work together with in a with a common voice, across the tenants, or potential tenants, it helps a lot because people know different things … divide and conquer, in one way, you can call it, how when we're together, you can be more powerful."

Collective voice

For residents of Heaton, issues around confidence in self-expression were more limited, and less multi-generational – in Shieldfield, deeper issues exist shaped by their relationship to the Council and developers. In considering the future, and SoP among Shieldfield residents, Dwellbeing has – for many – taken on the role of supporting place identity and attachment, building more ownership among residents and supporting them in the confidence needed to make claims about changes. Having a space for such discussions, building relationships and collaborations, Dwellbeing offers the opportunity to tackle the issues around SoP and OS threatened in the area for decades.

The most dominant theme of the focus group was of meeting spaces and promoting a collective voice through such spaces. Mention was made of the loss of Shieldfield's pubs - community spaces to meet freely were of great importance. This was linked to multicultural communities, supporting migrants and refugees in settling or becoming more confident, and promoting intergenerational activities to build connections between locals and visitors, old and young. The final discussion was focused on community activism. The rumours, and the continued existence of gossip and concern for future demolition, were identified as deep-rooted and restrictive, feelings that could be called traumatic. Primarily, the environmental and social impact of demolition was not discussed, instead the conversation focused on economically viable options, financial logic behind demolition and land use. The answer to

building use lies in ownership, bringing them closer to the community itself – the top-down approach of construction without meaningful consultation has proven inefficient.

Conclusions and future work in Shieldfield

Grenville (2007) discusses OS through the built environment as "a bulwark against a transient and untrustworthy external world," and this transience is felt deeply by Shieldfield residents, with even major PBSA constructions still seen as somewhat temporary. Beauregard (1996) identifies a culture in modern urban regeneration focusing on "newness" and "growth", "hailing restlessness as a positive virtue." There is evidently a sense that this restlessness has been imposed on Shieldfield, with a storm of "gossip" and "rumours" about future urban transformation, at stark contrast to the more stable perceptions of space in Heaton. There is evidence that demolition, for Heaton residents, is a controlled process responding to local activism and public outcry. Specific sites are targeted, but should any historic or beloved building be the subject of proposals, there is a shared confidence that groups could speak up and confront the authorities. In Shieldfield, however, the sheer scale of demolition the community has seen, the spaces lost, and the extreme disparity in investment between new constructions and the original urban landscape, have emphasised the exclusion of the residents from any control or ownership over the process. Constructive proposals addressing the "segregation" of various demographics in Shieldfield could lead to neighbourhood-based solidarity, and ameliorate hostility often felt towards student populations by residents.

Demolition is too often a tool of development originating from outside the community, used to benefit people from outside the community, at the expense of the residents, while for the Heaton residents, their needs and wishes were more recognised and acknowledged through the planning and development system. The impact of demolition on SoP is thus made clear, in the erosion of familiar spaces, historic spaces, and public spaces, an uncertainty coming from living in an area with a reputation for "regeneration". Place dependence is vulnerable in the face of demolition, with the capital-intensive demolition and construction industry reinforcing the profit-seeking function of new constructions, far from the needs of the residents.

The study only offers an indication, but there is evidence that prolonged contact with demolition with such an evident power dynamic as seen in Shieldfield is damaging to SoP, and can erode the OS of residents in the short- and long-terms. Demolition is not neutral, but operates on a political and profit basis, and thus privatisation of space and loss of public services are

closely connected. There is no evidence that feeling control over the process of demolition, and seeing direct benefits from it, could strengthen SoP in a hypothetical neighbourhood not affected by the loss of services, but if demolition could be brought closer to resident influence and the site was notably damaging to SoP, this could be investigated further. Demolition is an incredibly harmful process embedded far from public participation, firmly within national and international flows of profit and investment. By giving decision-making power to those on ground level, who live the space, a far more just and humane approach to spatial planning can be achieved – by trusting citizens, by listening to them, giving them resources and time. The ongoing architectural trauma of Shieldfield, resulting in being seen from within and without as a transient, ever-changing space of exploitation and profit, must change.

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