

Imaging Homelessness in a City of Care was a participatory mapping project undertaken with 30 single homeless people in Newcastle-upon-Tyne (UK) in 2014. The project's objectives were three-fold: to pilot an innovative mapping-based methodology; to offer single homeless individuals an opportunity to comment on local service provision and delivery; and to inform and challenge public perceptions of homelessness. In what follows, we outline the context for the project and the reasons for adopting a mapping approach. We then discuss the research process and the various insights generated. Finally, we reflect on the effectiveness of the methodology used.

Research Context

The term "single homelessness" refers to adults without dependent children who are not entitled to housing provision under homelessness legislation in England. In the absence of formal monitoring processes, it is a category of homelessness which remains largely unquantified. Figures indicate, however, that rough sleeping levels have increased by 134% since 2010 (DCLG, 2017). The increased visibility of homelessness on our streets is provoking mixed reactions. Gifts and donations to many homelessness charities have increased, while greater engagement with street homelessness by faith-based groups is also evident (Cloke et al., 2012). At the same time, media scrutiny of the character and morality of homeless people has also increased (Fitzpatrick & Pawson, 2014), and punitive responses to street homelessness also remain prevalent (Harding & Irving, 2014). In this highly polarised context, it is important to both inform and challenge public perceptions of homelessness.

Research Process

The research proceeded by means of six workshops with 30 rough sleepers and users of supported accommodation. Participants were encouraged to annotate two-dimensional maps of the Newcastle city centre with reflections on the spaces, places and experiences significant to their life courses. The maps played a useful prompting role in the surfacing of participants' experiences, attitudes and values. Many participants were engaged with following a night of rough sleeping, meaning the articulation of life events through conventional talk-based methods would likely have proven challenging. Furthermore, the intuitive nature of map-making was intended to empower participants to take control of the research process. The generated mappings were shared with the artist Lovely JoJo, who prepared a "composite" map. The aim here was to present the participants' perspectives in a manner that was deliberately lo-fi and therefore in keeping with their selective and subjective nature.

Findings

The composite map displays a complex and often contradictory mix of practices. First, it highlights the large diversity of pathways along which individuals progress into homelessness; "evidence" that, while some people may be more predisposed to falling into homelessness, ultimately, anyone can fall victim. Second, the map highlights the daily challenges associated with street homelessness, as well as the multiplicity of survival strategies employed in response. While many of the strategies in evidence resonate with existing stereotypes, they can also be viewed as instances of "individuals cleverly deploying their creativity, competence and cultural knowledge to survive" (Duneier, 1999: 312). Third, it presents a series of counter-readings of the use of city spaces and forms. Doorways, for example, are reproduced as social and sleeping spaces, while pipes and ducts are shown to provide a modicum of warmth and comfort. Fourth, the map reveals a range of behaviours and activities characteristic of "normal" functioning lifestyles, thus presenting the participants as fully emotional subjects with needs, desires and a genuine sense of themselves (May & Cloke, 2014). Finally, it depicts the variety of the city's homelessness services. While there was evidence of punitive responses to homelessness, most participants spoke highly of the received support.

Participatory Mapping as a Social Research Method

The map proved highly effective in capturing the imaginations of audiences. The project's launch was attended by over 60 policy makers, practitioners and academics. The project blog has received over 5,000 hits from over 40 countries, and the map has received widespread media coverage, with an audience reach of over 2.5 million. The positive reaction appears to be based on the ability of the map to engage audiences instinctively and emotionally. Those offering comments stressed how the map served to emphasise the many different meanings assigned to the city, whilst also humanising discussions of homelessness. Comments included: "I found the maps of the participants and Lovely JoJo deeply affecting. I find myself returning to them and reconsidering the places I thought I knew."

However, the composite map is not without limitations. It does not provide an objective picture of homelessness in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. On the contrary, it is a social construction with its own performative character. Participants selected information to be mapped based on their "in-the-moment" subjective realities. Furthermore, the map is only partially able to depict the complexity of homelessness. Objects and events which lack geographical specificity (e.g. mobilities) are frequently obscured, despite the array of arrows and symbols. Therefore, mapping processes such as this one are probably most useful when used in combination with other methods of data collection.

Conclusion

For us, the experience of participatory mapping has confirmed the suggestion that many traditional methods of social science fail to engage with the many aspects of everyday life, thus lying outside the narrow discourse. There are, on occasions, thoughts, feelings and experiences that are simply "unspeakable". The value of maps such as this one, therefore, lies in their ability to engage an audience instinctively and emotionally, rather than through "rational" argument. Creative approaches to writing, mapping and image-making appear to be just some of the ways in which researchers can seek to access and communicate embodied and pre-reflexive knowledge.

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Illustrations

Map by Lovely Jojo's (lovelyjojoes.com)



ooty →

↑
TB Secondary school

↑
'IN WHITLEY BAY AGED 16-21'
- SAM



'DID LOTS OF JOB COURSES IN NORTH SHIELDS, JOINERY, DECORATING, NEVER HAD A JOB'
- A.J.

'STILL USING DRINK + DRUGS BUT VERY SAFE'

↑
in flat - moving away from dad
memories, self worth higher

↑
'I WENT TO TYNE MET COLLEGE I DID LEVEL 1+2 LEARNING SKILLS'
- LS



planned by man

School died
2 friends time
confusing
looking BK

SALVATION ARMY
cedar House

BERT, 27

WENT TO WARRINGTON SCHOOL FOR 9 DAYS BUT DIDN'T LIKE IT, SO DIDN'T FINISH. MAMA WORKED FT SO COULD SWEAK HOME DURING THE DAY HAD TO HIDE IN THE CURTAINS WHEN MAMA CAME HOME. WAS 20 ST!

FINISHED THERE WHEN LEE.

WENT TO ST JAMES WITH BILLY TO SEE MRS BILLY/HEIK. PLAY WAS A MAKING UP DAY. AGENCY CAME BACK TO DRAW + -4. BILLY WOULDNT TAKE A REB ON IT.

IN NEWCASTLE, THERE IS NO NEED FOR ANYONE TO BE HUNGRY AND DIRTY. YOU CAN GET MONEY TO FEED A FEW TIMES A DAY AND ALWAYS GET A SEVERAL REALLY GOOD COMPAS. NEW DRUG CAPITAL OF THE NE.

SA-3 DAYS, KICKED OUT I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED DURING THESE 3 DAYS - LITTLE MEMORY!

ENDED UP IN THE GENERAL.

1ST FISHES. RAN ENGER - FOOD, SHOWER, CLEAN CLOTHES. FRANK'S HOUSE. OK AT THE TIME BUT ALL ON DRUGS AND ALCOHOL. WAS A NORMAL WAY OF LIFE IN THERE. HUNG OUT WITH YOUNG PEOPLE + STARTED TAKING DRUGS. OVERDOSED ON HEROIN.

HAAS WAS TOLD THERE WAS NO BED ANYWHERE FOR THEM BUT BILLY CALLED, HAD A BED FOR THEM. WOULD HAVE HAD TO SLEEP ROUGH.

WAS CLEAN, WORKING, HAVING FUN HERE. PROBLEMS STARTED IN THE HOSTELS.

MOVED TO TOMS. CLAYBURN VILLAGE. UNITS FOR MEMORIES SACE. WOULD HAVE SAVED THEM.

BILLY HILDE, WAS A RUNNIN' HAVIN' HERE, BUT LIKED IT BETTER. BEST HOSTEL IN THE NEER HELP. CIREMANS HAVE BEEN THE ONLY SERVICE TO HELP.

WANTED FOR PATRICK FOOD FOR A YEAR. LOVED IT, FOR CONTRAST SO HAD REQUANT. GOT LOOKED OUT OF HOME AT 19 FIGHT WITH SKOTR. SISTERS ALWAYS BEEN THE FAVORITE AS SHE'S THE ONLY GIRL!

ELIOT HELPED GET A FLAT HERE. FRANKS AS LONG OWN COMPANY. BUT LIED ABOUT DRUGS HABIT, WAS STILL WORKING THROUGH TRAINING THROUGH ACHIEVEMENT. REARSD THROUGH LEAVING WITH GIRLS.

COME DOWN FROM 90 - 75 MRS OF MATH. WHEN DOWN TO 30, HAS FUNDING TO GO TO PETHAR. WANTS OWN FLAT. WHEN CLEAN NEVER GOTTING TO DOG ANYTHING ADDICTIVE AGAIN.

MOVED TO LUTHERSTON. HAD A FLAT. BILLY ALSO UP IN SCOTTY SHIELDS, ST.

BETTER SINCE HE USED TO CHUCK PINS OUT OF THE WINDOW. THOUGHT THE DIRT NEEDLES. THOUGHT THE DIRT SIDE OF THESE PLACES.

MOVED NEXT TO BILLY'S MAM. DIRT ONE ON.

REARSD ALSO UP IN SCOTTY SHIELDS, ST.

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NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE



BERT MOVED HERE WHEN 18

BBC PINK PALACE

Castle Leazes

meeting spot as a young teen - Paul

"LEAZES PARK. FIRST PRIZE WITH LASS" - SCOTT

"SLEEP UNDER TREES"

Leazes Park

"FINALLY MET MICHAEL WHO SHOWED ME WHERE TO GO FOR HELP + SUPPORT!" - GEORGIA

Arthur's Hill

Gettin High

"Kicked out Yr 4 Trying to Stab Teacher" - Paul

MAM LIVES HERE!

Went to School from YR 8 to Yr 11. Should have Attended more

"GOT KICKED OUT FOR HAVING 350ME" - SHIREEN

Westgate Hill Primary School

Education is the ability to almost anything without losing your temper or your self - confidence Robert Frost

"USED TO PLAY FOR TOON AT AGE 12 TO 15 MET ALL PLAYERS SADLY LEFT YEAR BEFORE SHEARER'S ARRIVAL" - J.T.

St James

"Love to go cant afford to go!" - TH

"GOT A HOUSE"

"I'D LIKE TO GO BOWLING" - LS

Wavelength Shared Housing

CHANGING LIVES Elliott House

"I SE HOUSE SUPPORTED" - LS

HARRIS IS A GOOD KEY WORKER

"OK LIVED HERE 4 WEEKS"

"BETTER STAGE CHUCKED OUT JR. USED TO CHUCK PINS OUT OF THE WINDOW. USED DIRTY NEEDLES THAT'S THE BAD SIDE OF THESE PLACES?"

"Wipe your Feet on Way out" - SHIREEN

Elswick Park

"Born + Bread HERE!" - Paul

"my SISTER LIVES IN JUBILEE ESTATE. SOMETIMES SEE HER!" - A.J.

CHANGING LIVES Hawthorn Terrace

Family

"WANT TO GO BACK" - GORDON

SHINY NEW CARS

"Moved to SCOTSWOOD "GETTING IN BOTHER IN WALLSEM" - Michael

"GREW UP IN SCOTSWOOD. INVINCIBLE ST. That's why you can't see it"

"IN SW FOR 10 YEARS GOT A YTS (WHITLEY BAY)"

"I know invincible doesn't mean that"

"I WANTED TO DIE" - SAM

"WENT TO ST JAMES WITH BRO TO SEE RESIDENTIAL WORK. WAS A MESS UP DAY" - BERT

"LIVED HERE WHEN FIRST HOMELESS. MADE FRIENDS BUT REVOLVED AROUND DRUGS + ALCOHOL" - A.J.

FRIEND DIED

"FOOD'S ALRIGHT... TOO MANY PEOPLE CAUSING TROUBLE!"

CHANGING LIVES

"FOOD'S ALRIGHT... ATE 2 DINNERS + PUDDINGS + MICHAEL'S DINNER" - GEORGIA

Shelter Gate

"cinema good" - David

"IT'S QUIET. USED TO CHAOS. MISS SOMETIMES!"

St James Foyer

"OWN TENANCY" - David

"Lived here for 12 years" - TYNNE THEATRE

DANCECITY

"I'D LIKE TO DANCE IN THE FUTURE!"

Happy Chip

"I'D LIKE TO GO ICE SKATING" - LS

PROBATION TWICE A WEEK

CASINO

"my college" - David

"studied drama" - LS

Newcastle College

"WHERE GEORGIA GOT HER HEALTH + SOCIAL CARE DIPLOMA AND ENOUGH UCAS POINTS TO GO AND ENOUGH UN1. LEAVING TO SUNDERLAND UN1. CARE TEAM USED ME AS AN EXAMPLE OF SOMEONE WHO STARTED WITH NOTHING AND WENT TO UN1"

Newcastle Metro Radio Arena

"EVENT cover our contract" - Paul

Hard + Boring work

Daily walk across Redheugh

THE TYNE. B4 ELLIOTT GAVE ME A BED I WAS HOMELESS I WANTED TO DIE

