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Reflections from a photography walking tour
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Walking the neighbourhood, seeing the small details of community life: Reflections from a photography walking tour

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Abstract
This paper examines the value of photography walking tours for exploring meanings and experiences of community. The work is part of a larger visual research project which sought to examine the everyday lives of residents in a neighbourhood identified as ‘disadvantaged’, with the tour being organized as an opportunity for residents to identify what they valued about their local environment and what they considered to be problematic. The dynamics involved in gathering this photographic record are one element of the discussion as is analysis of the ways in which the participants constructed and re-constructed their sense of community through the different examples they selected for photographing. The paper is thus concerned with the ways in which visual data bring different insights to understandings of which practices, services and resources are embedded in meanings of community in working-class neighbourhoods and, in turn, how such data might have value for informing policy and practice about the experiences of inequality in contemporary England.

Key words
community, inequalities, photographs, policy, residents

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Introduction

Something that’s not advertised as much … council properties, that were built for the council … I mean the kids on this estate are fantastically supplied; areas to play on, grassed areas, football pitches, god knows what else, but you won’t find them on private estates. (Irene, estate resident)

As levels of health and social inequalities in contemporary Britain have continued to grow over the past decade (Dorling, 2010; Hills et al., 2009; Marmot, 2010), so too has the determination by governments and third sector organizations to empower ‘disadvantaged’ communities, as a way of enabling their engagement with different aspects of public life (Tam, 2007) or of encouraging more effective local level partnerships and programmes between communities and local agencies (DoH, 1999; East, 2002). However, whether viewed through such New Labour initiatives as the New Deal for Communities or the Conservative-led coalition government’s rhetoric about the ‘Big Society’ and social mobility, there has been little change to the ways in which poorer communities have been imagined, conceptualized or constituted. Indeed, as Rogaly and Taylor (2011) have argued in relation to research they conducted on three council estates in Norwich:

The most recent construction of [these estates] as deprived, in order to get funding under the New Deal for Communities scheme, reinforced the prevailing stereotype of the area as bounded and poor, and hid the ambiguities and fluidities of people’s understandings of their area. (Rogaly and Taylor, 2011: 70)

This paper is similarly concerned with how stereotypes of poverty, disadvantage and inequality blur the complexities of lived experience and elide the practices through which individuals understand and negotiate the structural constraints of their lives. This is not to suggest that such experiences and practices do not have profound consequences for employment, education, family life, health and life chances more broadly but rather to propose that research which can offer different insights into the everyday lives of those living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods could also have the potential to inform policy and practice in different ways too. The aim in this paper is to explore how visual methodologies and visual data might have useful contributions to make in this respect.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first outlines the history of the estate which forms the focus of the discussion, examining how it has been portrayed by both ‘outsiders’ and ‘insiders’ and how accounts by the former have generated and consolidated a particular pathologization of the neighbourhood. The second explains the origins and aims of the larger research project from which this work developed. It then goes on to detail
how one methodological approach, a photography walking tour, was selected to engage with a group of residents and what this approach offers for revealing experiences and meanings of community. The third section undertakes a detailed analysis of a small selection of photographs that were taken during a walking tour and explores what they convey about the participants' investments in community and attachments to place. Finally the paper concludes by considering the methodological value of the photography walking tour for community research and the insights that visual data provide for informing policy makers, practitioners and organizations about experiences of inequality and disadvantage.

Community: Histories, testimonies and contexts

In 1968 Brian Jackson published Working Class Community in which he acknowledges how the now seminal sociological studies of community and family life of the late 1950s (for example, Dennis et al., 1956; Marris, 1958; Townsend, 1957; Young and Willmott, 1957) had resulted in a powerful understanding and record of working-class life and generated 'a sharpened sense of inequality and avoidable neglect' (Jackson, 1968: 13). At the same time he points to the insights that the 'creative artist' of the period had contributed, mentioning not only novelists and playwrights but also artists such as L. S. Lowry. In such ways Jackson builds his argument for looking at the meanings and experiences of community in different ways, noting the wealth of knowledge provided by social science but also keen to integrate insights from other cultural resources which, in 1968, might have been overlooked.

Working Class Community and its publication date are significant for two different reasons in this paper. On the one hand, Jackson identifies the diverse theoretical and methodological approaches that he believed were needed not only to explore the complexities of disadvantaged communities but also to develop the sorts of knowledge necessary to 'help us progress to a more equal society' (Jackson, 1968: 168). This perception of the dual role to be played by research is one that guides the interests and concerns here and, more especially, the argument that visual methodologies can generate ‘thick’ descriptions that might be used to inform policy and practice. On the other hand, although Jackson’s study can be read today as a commemoration of a now arguably lost working-class life in the north of England, it is important not to forget the experiences of other working-class communities during this same period especially those within Britain’s burgeoning new towns. The movements of people to these localities disrupted and often severed long-standing employment histories, cultural traditions and familial ties. However, they generated different connections and new forms of community too, albeit ones often viewed by middle-class researchers as inferior to ‘the “traditional” urban
working class community with its corner pubs, terraced streets and local markets’ (Clapson, 2005: 66). It is one such community, with its origins in the post-war development of Britain’s new towns, which is examined here.

Since the mid-twentieth century studies of working-class life so praised by Jackson, the concept of community has been defined and redefined in multiple ways by different academic disciplines and to serve different political and policy interests (see Mooney and Neal, 2009). Use of the concept in this paper draws upon one of the definitions of community relationships proposed by Morris and Mogey (1965), which identifies the significance of feelings [my emphasis] about living in a particular locality, while also recognizing more recent theorizing about the fluidity and temporality of place (Massey, 1995) as well as differences in the representations and experiences of places (Rogaly and Taylor, 2011). Acknowledgement of these differences is crucial to understanding the processes of inclusion and exclusion that are generated by ideas and practices of communities (Brent, 2009; Hoggett, 1997) and to recognizing ‘the grids of power’ (Waterton and Smith, 2010: 9) that mark experiences of community life. The spatial, temporal and relational contexts in which community is experienced and imagined and the importance of paying attention to the emotional dynamics which ‘places have upon people who reside within them’ (Nowell et al., 2006: 30) frame, therefore, the analytic concerns of this discussion.

The community at the centre of the research is located in the large, relatively affluent new town of Milton Keynes and, more particularly, on an estate built in the ‘heroic first years’ (Bendixson and Platt, 1992: 96) of the town’s development. The estate is characterized by its long streets, wide avenues and ‘terraces [of houses] as straight as railway tracks’ (Bendixson and Platt, 1992: 96); a design which has been criticized, arguably with some justification, for being little more than ‘repetitive worker housing schemes’ (Bendixson and Platt, 1992: 100). The estate’s architecture and planning have resulted in problems for its current residents and contributed to its status within the town. Visitors find the unconventional design of the houses and the layout of the estate confusing while residents have erected high fences to mark the boundary of their homes, gardens and parking spaces; fences which are suggestive of ‘barricades’ but which serve to establish a ‘private’ space within the very ‘public’ spatial design of the estate. In such ways the estate’s design clearly reflects what Ravetz (2001) has argued about the histories of other British council estates and new towns built in the 1960s and 1970s, when American ‘Radburn-type’ planning became a design hallmark. As an urban design experiment for public housing in America, it had sought to separate cars and pedestrians but ‘Radburn-type’ British estates often resulted in ‘unfamiliar geometries [and] unclear distinctions between public and private space’ (Ravetz, 2001: 188).
The estate also needs to be understood through the extent of social and economic disadvantage experienced by its residents while, at the same time, not losing sight of Brent’s (2009) critique of the ways in which statistics can objectify people into tables and graphs and, thereby, diminish their lives. The population of the estate is made up of slightly more than 2000 residents, of whom almost 60% live in homes rented from the council and housing associations (Milton Keynes Council, 2003). The estate is in one of the most impoverished wards in the town, with the local MP recently identifying the ‘staggering’ statistic that residents of the ward were likely to die twelve years earlier than those of other wards (see also Frossell, 2010). Relatedly over 20% of residents are categorized as ‘economically inactive’ because of sickness, disability or caring responsibilities (Milton Keynes Council, 2003). Moreover the extent of poverty associated with the estate is overlaid with wider negative stereotyping of working-class communities which has become such a feature of the media and more generally (Connor, 2010; Tyler, 2008). A report in the town’s local press, for example, described a ‘prank’ email about a similarly disadvantaged neighbourhood, in which a councillor pretended an earthquake had struck the estate, waking residents ‘before their Giros arrived’ and causing ‘in excess of £17.55 worth of damage’ (Murrer, 2011: 3).

Yet residents’ personal histories and contemporary experiences of this and similarly designed estates in the town are more complicated and diverse than such outsider accounts by planners, architects, academics and councillors might suggest (see also Rogaly and Taylor, 2011). Residents’ testimonies reflect the complex emotional attachments and meanings invested in their homes and local community and, in turn, the significance of past and present experiences in their constitution. For example, women with experiences of homelessness, bed and breakfast accommodation and hostels described the opportunity to make a home for themselves on the estate in the 1970s as ‘a godsend … it was heaven!’ (Finnegan, 1998: 151); while others, who had moved from overcrowded accommodation in London, relished having ‘a brand new home so you could start from scratch, the garden as well’ (Mrs Edgar: Living Archive). Improvements to children’s everyday lives were equally significant for mothers moving to the estate: ‘My kids thought it was wonderful. You see, in London they couldn’t play out, didn’t have a garden, didn’t have access to any freedom, but here they did’ (Sue Lloyd: Living Archive). Thus, as Ward (1993: 11) has argued, it is often the more privileged who have been so dismissive of the improvements in housing for those who were part of the ‘New Town adventure’.

Inclusion of these insider and outsider accounts of the estate’s development has illustrated that while community history often stretches beyond current experience (Crow, 2008), it also continues to shape the present. Accounts from older residents on the estate, which are so positive in the excerpts included above, are also nostalgic about a lost ‘Golden Age’ of
community (Brent, 2009; Williams, 1958). At the same time, while outsider accounts of the reasons why the estate is perceived to have ‘failed’ are often embedded in problems associated with the estate’s development, these have also become a powerful lens through which contemporary understandings of the neighbourhood are filtered. As a result residents live with histories which are shaped by mourning and loss and which perpetuate prejudice against the locality; both of which have to be negotiated in the construction of their own contemporary accounts about the estate and local community.

Such complexities have been a regular thread in research about the rise and decline of council estates and experiences of their residents (Hanley, 2008; Power, 1999; Power and Tunstall, 1995; Rogaly and Taylor, 2011), with local and national policy initiatives around ‘improvements’ to social housing often focusing upon more abstract and contested ideas, including community cohesion, neighbourhood regeneration, well-being or quality of life (Wetherell et al., 2007). Indeed, the project which generated this research had its origins in policy concerns about the quality of life on the estate, beginning as a collaborative piece of work between the lead investigators of an Economic and Social Research Council funded Seminar Series, Visual Dialogues: New Agendas in Inequalities Research, and a local Action Learning Project (ALP), funded by the Department for Communities and Local Government in 2010.

Community: Relationships and research

We joined the ALP in its early stages after being invited, as local academic ‘experts’ in the field, to attend a planning meeting at which we explained how visual methodologies and visual data might provide additional ‘evidence’ for the project. Work by the ALP team on the estate quickly identified how the poor quality of housing stock, and especially delays in fitting replacement windows, was an issue of overwhelming significance to many residents and their quality of life. Other aspects of the ALP research appeared to indicate a concern with the neighbourhood’s lack of community and, more particularly, the anti-social behaviour of its children and young people. This was the source of much complaint by some residents, councillors and the local media and illustrates, as Brent (2009: 79) has noted, how adults can project their own anxieties about the quality of life in a neighbourhood on to young people, ‘creating them as outsiders of their hoped for safe community’. Yet amongst many other residents, there appeared to be a determination to recognize the estate’s ‘community spirit’ and an equal desire to acknowledge its positive features. Thus when the grant was withdrawn, following the election of the coalition government in 2010, and the ALP prematurely concluded,
we decided to continue working on the estate and to complete the different strands of the research project which we had started.

Through the ALP we had been introduced to different gatekeepers and stakeholders in the neighbourhood, including councillors and community activists. We had also met residents at meetings organized by the ALP team, wherein we had explained our interest in understanding more about local community experiences. Those attending these events were predominantly white working-class women, reflecting both the demographic of class and race across the estate and the contributions which women make to their local communities (Hoggett, 1997; Staeheli, 2003). Building on relationships established at these meetings and as a way of acknowledging the different standpoints of the people involved, we began three strands of work. Two were supported by women working as youth leaders and involved using a range of visual methods with children attending an out-of-school centre (see Lomax, 2012; Lomax et al., 2011). This paper comes out of the third strand, in which we organized a photography walking tour for women residents who were interested in showing what they valued about their community and what they deemed to be problematic. During the tour we were accompanied by a professional photographer who was directed by the participants to those aspects of everyday life that they wished to be captured as visual evidence of how community was practised, experienced and given meaning on the estate. The visualized accounts of community explored here, then, are shaped in different ways by the relational contexts of our participants’ lives and by their active interests and concerns with the neighbourhood.

As Crow (2000) illustrated in his overview of the use of photographs in what might now be identified as ‘classic’ community studies, there are many different approaches to research concerned with providing a visual sense of space and place. More recently, different visual methodologies have been used across a range of disciplines as a way of offering particular insights into the ways in which places have meaning for residents (Beckley et al., 2007; Bendiner-Viani, 2005; Nowell et al., 2006), as empowering participants’ involvement in community development (Purcell, 2009; Van Auken et al., 2010) and self-awareness (Sweetman, 2009) and as creating powerful evidence to bring about policy change (Lorenz and Kolb, 2009; Parkin and Coomber, 2009; Rhodes and Fitzgerald, 2006).

The approach in this paper cuts across the methods drawn upon in several of these studies, especially the emphasis on participation and generating data to encourage policy understanding, change, or action. More particularly it combines the research techniques of ‘walks’ and photography as a way of accessing how the women residents experienced and gave meaning to ideas of community because it is increasingly acknowledged that ‘interviews are not always sufficient for revealing different layers of place’ (Trell and Van Hoven, 2010: 92) or for making visible ‘how informants situate themselves
in the local social landscape’ (Kusenbach, 2003: 466). The tour was designed to be participatory with the participants shaping the trajectory of the walk and making decisions about which objects, practices and landmarks were to be photographed although they did not take photographs themselves. It was clear, as others conducting similar projects seeking to visualize community have found (Van Auken et al., 2010), that the participants had spent time considering what to photograph and were fully and creatively engaged with the task of representing their lived experiences. Walking together with the participants also appeared to develop a different type of relationship from that which had been established in earlier meetings about the ALP. As Hall et al. (2006) have argued similarly about their ‘sorties’, the photography walking tour not only allowed participants to lead the way and direct the focus of the research but it also positively encouraged an exchange of ideas between the researcher, the photographer, the participants as well as with other residents whom we met while walking through the neighbourhood.

Yet, at the same time and as argued elsewhere (Lomax et al., 2011), it is not possible to claim that working participatorily in this way necessarily empowered those on the tour (see also Buckingham, 2009; Prosser et al., 2008). Our research team was central in designing the purpose of the walk and in explaining to participants what we hoped to achieve. We had also carefully identified what should not be selected for photographing because of concerns about ethics and personal safety. The photographer, who had attended earlier meetings and organized a small exhibition of her work, was equally influential in how photographs were taken during the walking tour. Just as we were concerned to ensure that our reputation as researchers was ‘safeguarded’ by ensuring that photographs had been taken responsibly and had potential for analysing questions and debates about community, so she worked to uphold her reputation as the visual ‘expert’ in the team. Thus, as with any participatory research project, visual or otherwise, the dynamic of power was constantly in flux. It shifted repeatedly between all those involved, albeit that the walking tour was designed as a reflexive attempt on our part to empower residents by emphasizing that we recognized their knowledge about the estate and valued the opportunity to ‘see’ their lived experiences of community.

Community: Seeing and feeling

The six photographs that form the focus of analysis have been selected from a much larger number that were taken during the first half of the walking tour, which was led by Jane and Irene. Jane had recently moved to the estate with her husband and daughters while Irene, together with her husband and (adult) children, had a long history in the neighbourhood. Thus, as suggested above, the images offer a very particular view of the meanings and
experiences of community, which is often further reinforced by places and activities selected for inclusion in the tour.

Jane was the first to join the morning session of the tour and she led us immediately to a large playground, which was a popular meeting place for older children on the estate and a site where there had been considerable community activity the preceding summer when a mural had been painted on the boundary wall (Figure 1). Her daughters, with their friends, make regular use of this space and her older daughter is extremely proud of her contribution to the mural. Although wanting the vandalism of the surrounding wire-link fence to be photographed, Jane did not appear to be unduly concerned by it. Her account of the damage demonstrated an understanding of the tension between keeping the playground locked and ‘protected’ during the hours of darkness and young people’s desire to gather there in the evening. She thus recognized the contested nature of this space and the inevitability of it being claimed and owned by different age groups. In such ways, and unlike other residents, she expressed no feelings of threat regarding the presence of young people in the neighbourhood because she perceived them, like her own children, to be part of the community. Jane’s identity as the mother of two adolescent daughters was clearly central to these reactions just as it was to more emotional responses generated by the playground space for what Jane did find disturbing was the very personal character of the graffiti to be found there. Photographing and talking about the abusive and sexually explicit nature of

Figure 1. All photographs by Vicky Lamburn, who has kindly agreed to their reproduction here
this graffiti (Figure 2) proved useful for understanding the ways in which the playground was also a site of some ambivalence for Jane. She recognized that it was an important social space, bringing young people together, encouraging the development of their friendship networks and consolidating a sense of community for and of themselves. However, the graffiti also provided evidence of the playground as a highly gendered community space where abuse and sexual bullying was a controlling feature of young girls’ lives (Laville, 2011) and where the fragility of connections among young people could be painfully witnessed. Overall, then, photographs of the playground brought into view the ways in which age and gender intersected on the estate to produce a seemingly paradoxical experience of community for Jane which, as Burkett (2001: 242) has argued, ‘is about difference just as much as it is about unity, about conflict and harmony, selfishness and mutuality, separateness and wholeness, discomfort and comfort’ [original emphases].

We were joined at this point by Irene, who walked us first to the small, but well-stocked, local shop and post office because this had long been an important resource for residents and their families. With the exception of two fast food outlets and a hairdresser’s, there were no other shops on the estate and as a result a paucity of ‘gathering places’ or ‘sites of formal and informal interaction that can be so critical to the formation of community’ (Van Auken et al., 2010: 379). Including the shop in the walking tour was an indication that Irene recognized its practical value in the everyday lives of residents.
especially for those without access to a car or who found travelling by public transport problematic, but it might also be understood as an equally important emotional resource for her. As Bendiner-Viani (2005: 469) has illustrated in her analysis of guided tours in Brooklyn, shops and supermarkets often define the nature of the community which they serve but they can also house ‘people’s senses of self, comfort, and importantly, being-at-home in the place, in this public space of the neighbourhood’.

Outside the shop and with a very shrewd eye for visual detail, Irene indicated the way in which just one photograph could illustrate three other examples which she perceived to be crucial to positive experiences of community on the estate (Figure 3). This shot brings together the post box, the community centre and the bus stop and suggests Irene’s pleasure in the estate’s connections to the external world and her pride in what the centre represents in terms of residents’ practising community. The centre is a demonstration of residents identifying a need in everyday life on the estate and organizing themselves to meet what was required in terms of providing a place for people to meet and to find advice on issues such as debt, housing and benefits.

Taking us into the centre allowed Irene to show the relational nature of this community space because, since the café was open and volunteers in the

Figure 3. All photographs by Vicky Lamburn, who has kindly agreed to their reproduction here
cafés kitchen were preparing cooked breakfasts, residents of all ages were sitting, talking and eating together. Such a positive view of community life was clearly important to Irene but it was one small detail within this ‘picture’ which she requested to be photographed (Figure 4). It is a detail that researchers may well have missed but, for Irene, photographing the kitchen counter and the open box containing a significant amount of cash was an opportunity to reveal the levels of trust and reciprocity amongst residents. Moreover, as an image, it lends weight to Laurier et al.’s (2002: 363) argument about ‘the multiple arrays of quite ordinary morally accountable and morally formulative action that goes on [in neighbourhoods]’ and thereby challenges popular assumptions about the breakdown of social and moral order in disadvantaged communities.

Figure 4. All photographs by Vicky Lamburn, who has kindly agreed to their reproduction here
As the walking tour progressed, Irene and Jane also pointed out examples of the poor maintenance of the estate’s infrastructure which they regarded as undermining the more life-affirming aspects of community experience. Examples identified for photographing included cracked and broken pavements, missing drain covers and unsightly weeds, all of which the two women saw as a product of the local council’s lack of care for the estate and its residents and which arguably reinforced their own sense of being marginalized within the wider, more affluent space of the town (Sibley, 1995). Again such small details about the fabric of the estate could easily be overlooked by outsiders but the tour brought them into clear view, as did the skill of the photographer (Figure 5), and indicated how the physical condition of neighbourhoods can impact adversely upon the emotional lives of residents. Drawing upon the work of Sweetman (2009), it is also possible to suggest that the use and analysis of photographs generated in this way can reveal the significance of that which might be considered too mundane or unimportant to warrant attention or action by local policy makers but which, nonetheless, can have powerful negative effects upon people’s attachment to and pride in their neighbourhood and their investment in community life.

When the walking tour was drawing to a close, the relational nature of community spaces which had been identified by Jane and Irene and the
significance of age and gender to the constitution of relationships in those spaces were once again brought into view. Irene took us to what she identified as one of the ‘small parks’ which are dotted around the estate and which signify the importance placed upon spaces for children’s play that was built into the design of the neighbourhood (Figure 6). Just as Jane’s identity as a mother of adolescent girls was central to her focus upon the larger playground at the start of the tour, so Irene’s identity as an older woman and grandmother of young children was drawn upon to explain how small parks were an important feature of community on the estate. For Irene, such parks provided spaces for play and relaxation and could be enjoyed equally by different generations. However, without Irene’s identification of this space as important, it is unlikely that its significance would have been identified by the research team as the shelter appears somewhat dilapidated and the surrounding area slightly unkempt. The photograph thus offers the opportunity to look again and see ‘the unnoticed thing (or detail)’ (Bendiner-Viani, 2005: 461) and to appreciate how such details are experienced, valued and, more importantly, owned by local people. In the context of understanding community, it also suggests the importance of familiarity because, as Clarke et al. (2007) have argued, knowing people in a neighbourhood as well as the local geography affords a sense of ownership of the terrain and creates a feeling of safety.
Concluding thoughts on methodology, policy and practice

Through analysis of the visual data generated by a photography walking tour, this paper has sought to illustrate the complex practices and experiences of community in one neighbourhood while recognizing the ways these were shaped by the participants’ willingness to think critically (in all senses) about their local environment as well as their identities as white working-class wives and mothers. Generation, class and gender are, therefore, important threads for understanding this account of contemporary community life by Jane and Irene and, in turn, its partial nature with regard to questions of race and ethnicity. However, it is not the tour which produced such partiality, but rather the combination of the project’s origins in the ALP and the scale of research being undertaken. The photography walking tour, per se, brought much of value to the study of community on the estate. It clearly strengthened the relationship between the research team and participants, facilitating the dialogue about community we co-constructed around the photographs and demonstrating, thereby, the potential of such walking tours for exploring more diverse experiences of neighbourhood and community practices. At the same time, although the tour was not unproblematically empowering, it did provide participants with an opportunity to express their thoughts and emotions through a photographic ‘gaze’ which was almost exclusively theirs and which also compelled the research team to look at, see and feel their experiences. Such an evocation of the emotional dynamics of community indicates the value of visual data for extending understanding amongst policy makers, practitioners and community activists about the different ways in which feelings of disempowerment and frustration, pride and pleasure might be experienced by individuals and groups of people in any one locality at any one point in time.

In this respect, it might be argued that the use of images in the fast growing numbers of ‘DIY’ neighbourhood websites (Tucker and Arnot, 2010) could be an equally powerful way for residents to articulate their concerns and views and to make them ‘felt’. However, to date, there is insufficient understanding about the effectiveness of social media in promoting community development or about the ways in which local councils and councillors understand and respond to visual resources on neighbourhood websites. Moreover the inclusion of images on such sites is rarely the focus of sustained reflection or dialogue although they often serve as illustration of personal meaning systems. It is academic research which continues to interrogate what Stevenson (2003: 72) describes as ‘the connectedness of the lived and the structural elements of urban life’ with visual research methods offering creative and participatory opportunities to generate locally produced knowledge about the nature of that connectedness.
In this context, then, the visual’s potential power for shaping policy and professional practice can be understood through its generation of ‘thick’ descriptions of the lived experiences of disadvantaged neighbourhoods and its creation of openings to feel and share emotions about those experiences. As Lorenz and Kolb (2009) argue, perception and learning are influenced by a combination of emotions and cognition and so, while statistics may convince policy makers that particular problems should be addressed, visual data may be more effective in encouraging their attention and action. The walking tour’s identification of the ‘small details’ which reflect and promote positive experiences of place suggests how equally small changes to the resourcing and physical maintenance of neighbourhoods at a local level might have an exponentially larger impact upon diverse perceptions of personal and community well-being. In a period of recession and sweeping public sector cuts, this may be of increasing relevance for local authorities while for those whose lives are shadowed and marked by the powerful structures of inequality, such evidence can only serve to challenge pervasive stereotyping discourses of poverty and inform the alleviation of disadvantage.

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Notes
1. Although the estate is not named in the paper, it is not possible to fully anonymize if photographs and other contextual details are present. However, it is important to include both in order to illustrate the sometimes divergent nature of discourse/rhetoric and experience. Participants of the walking tour have, therefore, been given pseudonyms and no information about their personal lives, which might reveal their identities, has been disclosed. The analysis has been shaped by a duty of care to them and a determination that their views and experiences be acknowledged. See Wiles et al. (2008) for discussion of the challenges of confidentiality and anonymization in contemporary social research.

2. Living Archive was conceived as an antidote to the popular assertion that ‘new towns have no history’. Amongst a range of projects and community initiatives, it has recorded and archived oral histories of the lives of Milton Keynes’ residents and their sense of place. http://www.livingarchive.org.uk/

3. In the 2001 census 86.8% of residents on the estate identified as White British while indices of deprivation together with statistics relating to ‘occupation’ and
other ‘general social indicators’ (Milton Keynes Council, 2003) suggest this is an overwhelmingly working-class area.

4. Professional photographers are not generally used in participatory visual methodologies but the ALP team, and ourselves, were keen to ensure that the visual data collected were of a quality that could be used in a range of exhibitions and presentations about the residents’ lives. The data are, therefore, of a different ‘order’ to that generally produced in participatory visual research, shaped as they are by the photographer’s technical skills and professional expertise.

References


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