dwellbeing shieldfield: reconnecting to land in the financialised city

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production studies series

This booklet is part of the *Production Studies Series* - a set of 12 publications, each introducing a case central to the formation of this new field of studies and exemplifying its concerns. The series has been created as part of the research project *Translating Ferro/Transforming Knowledge in architecture, design and labour for a new field of Production Studies* (TF/TK). Funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo, the project was led by Professors Katie Lloyd Thomas and João Marcos de Almeida Lopes. From 2020 to 2024 TF/TK has brought together dozens of researchers, practitioners and activists from across various countries and institutions.

Sérgio Ferro's writings provided the common theoretical and critical ground for discussions within the project. His work, first presented to an English-speaking audience in 2014 during the 11th Architectural Humanities Research Association conference[1] at Newcastle University, has since gained international recognition, the singularity and analytic power of his work resonating beyond its native sphere of circulation in Brazil and France. A key achievement of TF/TK is precisely the translation and publication in English of a substantial part of his writings.[2] Each of these critical editions, overseen by Silke Kapp and Mariana Moura, have been meticulously carried out, through successive bilingual sessions, open to all affiliated researchers within the project and to guest collaborators, aimed at a collective reading of the translated pieces, text by text, chapter by chapter. From the beginning of the project, Ferro's writings have been a cornerstone of the research network, vital to the maturation of the field, stimulating debates and collaborations.

It was in this environment of intercultural and interdisciplinary exchanges that each of the volumes in this collection was produced, from its editorial conception to its circulation. Together with an edited collection, *Building Sites: Architecture, labour and the field of production studies*,[3] which features chapters by the research team, with many crossovers of concerns with the *Production Studies Series*, they form part of a broader effort to define and structure a field of studies that we have been calling 'Production Studies'. Production Studies (PS) undoubtedly refers to already established interests, although often dispersed across studies of architecture, construction,

self-building, cultures of construction, and participatory design. The PS field is proposed here as an axis which is both methodological and empirical, capable of bringing together objects apparently as diverse as cooperative, participatory and collaborative practices of design and work; processes that connect and separate design and the building site; agents and relationships directly involved in the formal and informal production of space; public policies for habitat design and production, in the countryside and in cities; pedagogical and disciplinary experiences that privilege forms and relations of production in the built environment; technical experiments or formal dilemmas capable of interrelate to 'situations in conflict' relating to production, from traditional practices and forms of knowledge, to actors external to academic, scientific or technological institutions.

Production Studies (PS) provides an empirical axis revealed in the study of specific cases located in time and space, which illuminate methodological, theoretical and political concerns. Inspired by the work of Karl Marx, William Morris, Sérgio Ferro, ProBE (the centre for research into the Production of the Built Environment), Peggy Deamer and the Architecture Lobby, amongst many others, the aim of the *Production Studies Series* is to promote the study of architecture/construction at the clash of various dichotomies: labour and capital; production and consumption; knowledge and power; technology and domination; autonomy and heteronomy. It seeks to overcome the design 'of' production through a shift to design 'for' more equitable and joyful forms of production. PS proposes a methodological approach that examines conflicts within architectural works: in their built materiality - visible or indexical; within work processes and relationships; within construction sites; and understands design creations, or ideas and solutions for construction as material productions. It views them in their mediations with political economy, labour history, the social history of culture, the anthropology of technique, the sociology of labour and not least with the know-how of construction workers. This intellectual endeavour is inherently a political ambition, in an understanding of theory, technique, art as types of practice, as part of the praxis of production and, therefore, as a form of action in reality. As weapons of class struggle, these forms of practice either work for its reproduction or for its transformation and overcoming; we recognise that while all too often production functions as a weapon of domination, it can also be a means of emancipation.

The booklets published in this series stand independently, each with its own institutional, theoretical and empirical backgrounds, expressing authors' prior research and experience. But it was amidst the constancy and intensity

of face-to-face and remote meetings within the TF/TK network; in the influx of and contentions between different methods, interpretations and references; in the sharing of various practical experiences, that the relevance of each of them might be appreciated in the context of the Production Studies we set out here.

The cases in this collection each focus on the 'production' aspect of the built environment, aiming to expand our traditional methods of studying and understanding architecture and construction, thus emphasizing the material, practical, economic, social and even bodily dimensions of work involved. They are not interested in supposedly original or paradigmatic architectural forms. Nor are they distinguished by a peculiar attraction to the nature, advancement or particularity of construction techniques. Neither do they assume the existence of a pure, universal rationality of construction sites. Their purpose is instead to illuminate their contradictions and conflicts, to review productive and political experiments capable of facing the deterioration of working conditions in contemporary construction sites across the planet. Ultimately, it is about observing, from an architectural point of view, in its broadest sense, the effects of the social division of labour - including divisions of gender, race, nationality and class - in the production of the built environment and natural resources.

josé lira
katie lloyd thomas
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notes

1 Katie Lloyd Thomas, Tilo Amhof and Nick Beech (eds), *Industries of Architecture*. London: Routledge, 2016.

2 Sérgio Ferro, *Architecture from Below*; *Design and the Building Site*; *Construction of Classical Design*. Translated by Ellen Heyward and Ana Naomi de Sousa; edited by Silke Kapp and Marianna Moura. London: MACK, 2024.

3 Matt Davies, Will Thomson, João Marcos de Almeida Lopes, Katie Lloyd Thomas (eds). *Building Sites: Architecture, labour and the field of production studies* London: Routledge, forthcoming.

This booklet is dedicated to the memory of John Armstrong (1925-2023), long time resident, historian and community leader in Shieldfield.

prologue

Within the void of a Victorian church an angry community demand to know, "Who's land is it anyway?" A developer replies, "Well… it was a shit hole anyway". The council planner locks his eyes on his feet.

A tree gets felled and a woman with a baby in a pram collects its pinecones. She remembers. The pinecones are witness to what went before. The next tree comes down just as it's about to blossom. The woman bandages its wound with a torn piece of fabric and on its bark she writes, 'Why?' She distributes the branches to friends and neighbours presented in jam jars, so they can bloom one last time on windowsills and in front gardens. It is the last goodbye for the cherry tree.

The earth gets drilled into, torn apart, its structure fragments and all that dwell in it are disturbed. Concrete is poured into its bowels, inside shutters and frames. Metal rods protrude, steel girders make a new landscape of perfect horizontals and verticals between which sit windows upon windows upon windows.

And so the reproduction of space keeps pace. Buildings go up and come down, land gets turned over repeatedly for new uses. They are mere investment packages to be bought and sold as 'real estate' around the world. The people who control this aren't here. These people have never stepped a foot in this place. They don't know the land, the landscape, the people, the place, but they disturb it.

a place disturbed

The estate of Shieldfield in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, is a place disturbed. It is a neighbourhood which has seen multiple waves of development and displacement of residents over many years, from 'slum clearances' in the middle of the twentieth century to a new wave of financialised development based around the burgeoning student housing market. The experience of Shieldfield, which I describe in this booklet, is now a familiar one across the world. As more glassy, glossy architectural visions appear, there seems no pause to 'growth for growth's sake', even in the face of local opposition. Community displacement, unbound capitalism and climate breakdown are entwined and as the climate crisis bites, communities make way for buildings which have no real reason to be, except to make money for already wealthy individuals.

It was this concern that brought me to work in Shieldfield – a neighbourhood that lies to the east of Newcastle city centre. In 2017, as an artist,

Fig. 1: The Shieldfield estate.

Fig. 2: Student accommodation blocks in Shieldfield.

I started what was originally to be a 2 year project entitled 'Dwelling', alongside two arts producer friends, Alison Merritt Smith and Hannah Marsden. At the time we were all working, volunteering or living in and around the neighbourhood and had followed the changes occurring to the urban fabric. Shieldfield's ward has seen increasing development pressures with a staggering 467 per cent increase in student housing numbers through the construction of purpose built student accommodation (PBSA) blocks around the periphery of the estate. The neighbourhood has become an island, leaving people feeling "hemmed in"[1] by new, generic developments that are physically and socially disconnected from the wider estate. Residents are increasingly worried about the long term future of the area, fearing that the close proximity of the neighbourhood to the

city centre will create continuing development pressures which could displace them from their homes.

Shieldfield is an economically deprived area, with nearly 50 per cent of children living in poverty. It's a place of big cultural change too. Being an area with a large concentration of social housing, it's where many refugees and asylum seekers who have their 'indefinite leave to remain'[2] live. Many residents feel that the 'student problem' has been engineered out of affluent areas and into a council estate, which arguably has less social resilience to fight proposals and cope with changes. They feel distant from institutions of power, ignored and disempowered, as one resident explained:

> We feel as if we've been left behind. I'm passionate about Shieldfield [...] I've always lived here and I've seen all the changes. But it's so sad, the decline in the community, and the spirit's gone. We've been promised different things so many times and we've been let down.[3]

Residents ended up exhausted from fighting planning applications (and losing), eroding trust in Newcastle City Council, with community concerns largely ignored in consultations. The peak of PBSA development was around 2015-18, and at the time there was no community forum through which to organise and defend the neighbourhood, so we began a project alongside a group of residents to better understand, and act on, these changes. This project has since become a constituted Community Benefit Society and co-operative called 'Dwellbeing Shieldfield', run by those that live and work in Shieldfield. As a co-operative, Dwellbeing is led by members who vote on key decisions within the organisation. It has a team of 'Stewards', who act as a Board, and are responsible for the legal running of the organisation and Dwellbeing employs seven part time workers (five of whom are residents), and many volunteers who contribute to the everyday operating of the organisation.

The experience of Shieldfield poses questions for other places that are being isolated, gentrified, run down, torn down, and where people have lost their connection to the land. It's sometimes hard to establish a connection to land in the city. I grew up in a very rural place, in one house surrounded by fields, ancient trees and a burn. It is a vast landscape that travels on for miles to the horizon. The landscape is a place that you can walk through without being impeded. Running for miles you'll never meet another soul. As a child I used to climb to the top of the hill behind the house and shout out loud. No-one heard. I was full with the land and the connection between me and it was real. But the urban landscape of brick, concrete, steel and glass can be a harsh one.

It hurts my feet when I walk too much, its planned streets impose a route for me, whether I want to take it or not. It radically transforms all the time, becoming fragmented and unfamiliar. I might walk around the same corner every day, and then one morning I'll turn and look up and suddenly a building is gone. The big yellow monster machines come and - knock knock knock - the building is down to the ground.

The changes that happen almost feel out of the control of the normal citizen. The citizen seems to have no agency in this cyclical process of demolition and rebuilding. This has been the experience of Shieldfield - going through multiple waves of redevelopment over many years. John Armstrong, a local historian and resident, said that losing familiar sights and places was like having your footing in life compromised. Rapid neighbourhood change can send both physical and social tremors through the life of a place. This booklet focuses on how urban communities can make attachments to land in places that have been, and are being, radically altered through processes of land financialisation. I do this through describing what I call practices of *Shieling* in Shieldfield. Shieling draws attention to buildings and places as economic, political, social and cultural processes, not just end products. As I highlight, these approaches have resonances, meaning and value for other communities facing similar pressures nationally and internationally.

shieling

One theory about the name 'Shieldfield' is that it was once a shieling ground – common land where people would graze their livestock in the summer months. The word 'shieling' refers to the huts or bothies where people would live which were made out of materials found directly in the landscape, such as heather, earth, turf and stones. Shielings were thus specific to the location in which they were built - created using local knowledge, skills and materials. For Dwellbeing, Shieling is a concept and action. It has become a central part of Dwellbeing's programme to enable residents to collectively analyse the tools and processes that produce financialised and socially and ecologically extractive forms of architecture (such as PBSA), as well as to activate community use of Shieldfield's public spaces and plan new community spaces that are built from the ground up, using Shieldfield's natural ecology and drawing upon its people, materiality and histories. Through Shieling, Dwellbeing has proposed alternative spatial processes which aim to build community agency and knowledge and which use the co-creation of urban space as a catalyst for social change. Most importantly Shieling has catalysed a sense of land consciousness and a connection to land for residents in an urban area where land has

been abused by those with political and economic power. In this booklet I describe some of the varied practices of Shieling, including action research into the financialisation of land, creating awareness of land histories, local food growing and tending to the land, understanding planning and development processes and creating moments of public celebration and everyday ritual.

building and rebuilding the estate

Jack remembers seeing the rubble of his old terraced house after the demolition. He remembers walking amongst it and wondering what will come next. He points at its location from the fourth floor of his tower block. His view across the city to the river is now masked by student housing.

After the demolition he moved to South Africa for work, as the Tyneside shipyards closed down one by one. Later, he returned to Shieldfield, to the largest tower block in the place. It was constructed using cast concrete panels. In spite of its concrete, there is a certain frailty to the building. Jack says that his block sways in the wind.

Shieldfield is separated from Newcastle city centre by the Central Motorway. Its four tower blocks stick out amidst the city's jutted skyline. They create tunnels of wind across the estate. In the winter the weather gets between the high rises. The wind circles and whistles, blowing small children over on their way to school, whilst parents cling onto prams about to take flight. Shieldfield shifts and moves with the weather and with the times. It is a place that has experienced multiple cycles of development since the first industrial communities settled in the nineteenth century. Its streets, terraced houses, shops, small industries and pubs were demolished during the 'slum clearances' of the 1950s and 60s to make way for a new planned urbanism of high rises, cul de sacs and Le Corbusier-style stilted flats. Roads replaced streets. The construction of these tower blocks was documented in the film *Sharp with the flats* in 1961. In the film men in suits sit around a model of Shieldfield-as-development-site. They point with pens at parts of the model. The camera moves to the construction site. Shutters are bolted together, concrete is poured in. Men hoist themselves into the sky, cigarettes in mouths. The narrator says, "With timed precision the building rises". He tells the viewer that the pre-fabrication of form work means that a complete floor can be constructed every five days. These are to be "practical and labour-saving homes".

These developments were part of T Dan Smith's (the charismatic and completely corrupt leader of Newcastle City Council) desire for Newcastle to become

Fig. 3: Sarah Street, Shieldfield before demolition

the 'Brasilia of the North' by running a motorway through the city centre, demolishing heritage buildings and lavishing concrete everywhere. Whilst the roots of these ideas emerged from a sort of paternal socialism of a (pre-conceived) notion of 'progress' and better living conditions for all, they often manifested in architectural ruthlessness. T Dan Smith never found the Geordie Oscar Niemeyer, and so what was conceived was often a cheap imitation of modernist ideas which broke up close communities and unsettled the social bonds between people. In a pamphlet written about Shieldfield's history John Armstrong writes: "there were various unseen bonds in existence that cannot be prefabricated by system or political interference, for the root of any community is deeply rooted in their history, and history is not made overnight"[4].

When Shieldfield was rebuilt it became a council estate. Much of Shieldfield's low rise council housing stock has since been sold off under the 1980 Right to Buy legislation which gave secure council tenants, and some housing associations, the legal right to buy their homes at a large discount. Ironically, much of this housing was sold by the original buyers and is now rented out to students by private landlords. Still, a substantial amount of housing, particularly the high rise stock, is owned by Newcastle City Council, and over 60 per cent of housing is in the social rented sector.

we've disappeared. we're not here

The last fifteen years has seen the next wave of redevelopment for Shieldfield. Land that was once industrial, housing small, local industries has been taken over by mass student housing developments. A new Lego landscape of coloured

plastic panelling has replaced the single storey industrial units. Swathes of block paving and easy-to-care-for privet forms a landscape of repetition. 20 purpose built student accommodation (PSBA) blocks have been built around the estate with a total of 5628 bedspaces. No longer Council led or funded development, this is wholly privately owned and developed, driven by off-shore pension funds and the wealth of the global elite through investment trusts.

Shieldfield's location next to the city centre and close to the universities meant that it was an accessible and attractive location for these developments. It's brownfield, ex-industrial land was described by one planning officer as an area where "nothing was happening. It was also contaminated land so now it's a better use". One developer went so far as to state that, "It's been the best thing that ever happened to Shieldfield because it was a shit hole". PBSA has affected the character and social mix of Shieldfield and has impacted social facilities, with the last of Shieldfield's pubs and its Social Club closing, either through demolition or renovation for student housing. A once lively social life has been lost. One community officer said: "people are quite isolated, so they're living in their own blocks and where do they actually come together? They feel like the 'community of then' isn't there anymore". A newspaper snippet from the *Evening Chronicle* shows resident Nora standing in front of the social club as its future lies in the balance. The article quotes the developer promising to create a bar and social club in the new development, but with a "modern twist". In the end it didn't happen on the grounds of 'feasibility' – another broken promise or perhaps just a lie to keep the planning committee and local councillors happy. There was to be no bar, no snooker table or dart board, just four floors of student flats.

These developments have been coupled with the effects of austerity. Shieldfield's public spaces have become a magnet for litter and fly tipping, its pavements are cracked and broken. The neighbourhood's democratic forums have also been affected. Resident's groups closed in the 2010s, so there was no formal mechanism through which people could have their say on new developments. Community members that had been active prior to this were burnt out from years of fighting planning applications (and losing). This has eroded trust in the Council, with residents' concerns largely ignored in consultations. They fought against each of the 20 student accommodation blocks, and each one was built, leaving residents feeling like they didn't matter, as one resident explained: "we've been promised… so many things, and it's as if

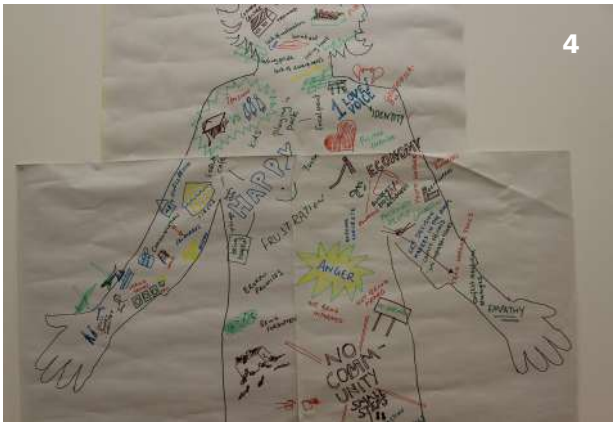
like, we're not even on the maps. It's like we've disappeared, we're not here". During university term time, the neighbourhood becomes a busy thoroughfare. Students make their way from houses, flats and student accommodation blocks to the university and city centre, day and night. But apart from passing each other in the street, not many residents come into social contact with students. They have become separate communities. So when we started the project we witnessed a community that was frustrated and angry, and looking for a way forward for their transforming neighbourhood.

philosophies and actions

developing a critical consciousness: participatory action research

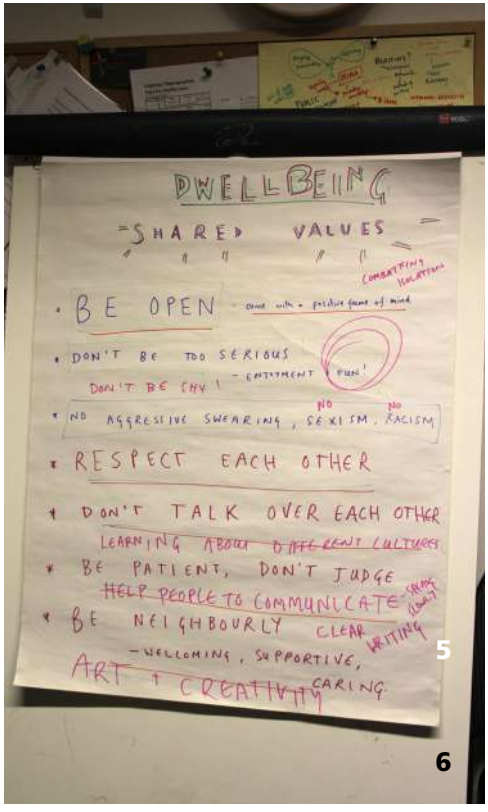
Dwellbeing has taken an arts-based Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to explore the effects of rapid urban development in Shieldfield. PAR involves collective enquiry into an issue, with an ultimate goal of social change. It aims to replace an extractive mode of research (researching 'on people') with a co-produced approach (researching 'with people')[5]. PAR emerged in the Global South in response to efforts to decolonise the social sciences, using new forms of critical pedagogy by working with those that had been the victims of colonialism through programmes of social and economic 'development'. In its infancy it connected to various struggles about land reform and anti-colonialism and employed new research methodologies, such as 'praxis', whereby ideas are reshaped into actions. For the past two decades PAR's attention in academic contexts has been growing, and whilst PAR practitioners engage with a wide variety of research contexts, issues and methods, underlying all of these is a commitment to challenge the imbalance between the 'researcher' and the 'researched' by conducting collaborative research which challenges the hierarchies normally ascribed within academic research. PAR highlights power relations that may be embedded in the participatory process as well as those that may be beyond it, such as structural violence and poverty. Using this as an approach, we aimed to co-produce new knowledge collectively, led by residents through equitable processes of learning.

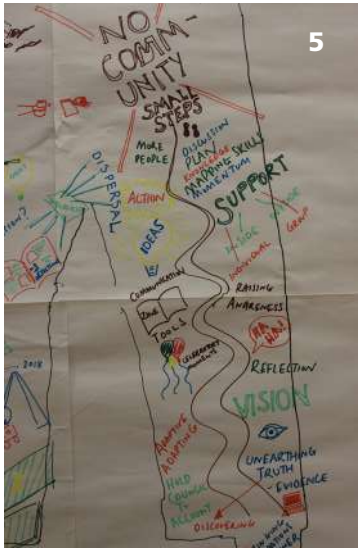
The work of Brazilian philosopher and educator Paolo Freire[6] has been an important part of Dwellbeing's approach. As a grammar teacher he saw a disconnection between the elitist educational practices that he and others were practicing and the real lives of the working class. In response, he



Figs. 4, 5: Bodymapping

Fig. 6: Dwellbeing values





developed a pedagogy of literacy education which centred around exchange between teacher and learner, where both learn, question, reflect and participate in making meaning. This process resulted in the development of what Freire calls a 'critical consciousness' (a process known in Portuguese as conscientização). The formation of critical consciousness allows people to question the nature of their historical and social situation and their ability to read their world. Freire believed that only by being able to understand their world can people take control of their situation.

Using this approach we understood the importance of building community based knowledges about what had happened in Shieldfield, to bring forth a 'critical consciousness'. Only through building knowledge of the situation could resilience be built to challenges that may occur now and in the future. One of the first activities we did was 'body mapping' to create an understanding and awareness of the situation in Shieldfield. In small groups we made a life size drawing of one person by tracing around them as they lay on the floor. The outline of the body was then filled with drawings and words, with each part of the body representing a different question to reflect on, including: What has happened here and why has it happened? What are people's feelings towards the situation? What are the community assets and skills and what is the vision for the community? This activity was about reflecting and projecting - looking back at what had happened and using this to project forward into the future to develop positive actions in the community.

This exercise was essential because it prompted residents to start from the beginning by understanding and acknowledging what has been lost, where the pain and hurt that sits within the community came from, and using this to project forward into the future. It is only through the recognition of anger and loss, that reflection of a situation or problem can occur, and from this the ability to hope in communities that have been ignored and hollowed out over many years may emerge. The body mapping was the beginning of a process that led into individual and collective understanding of the situation, political realisation and positive actions. This slow process has enabled residents to question the supposed truths of dominant claims to knowledge and has offered a powerful route to challenge the authority of economic and political elites, providing opportunities to speak 'to' and 'with' instruments of power, such as local authorities or developers, as I describe in more detail in this booklet. It is exactly this focus on social, political and educational learning that is missing from other forms of enquiry and action.

Fig. 7: Trip to Gresham, Middlesbrough with artist Isabel Lima

speaking through creativity: social art

Dwellbeing brings PAR into practice with 'social art'. We have found creativity to be an effective outlet for articulating stories otherwise difficult to communicate. Whilst social art practice often uses traditional art forms, it focuses on how art can be a vehicle for collaboration and social interaction. We drew from the roots of social arts practice, which connected the feminist and civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s to the emergence of the Community Arts Movement and ideas of cultural democracy in the UK around the same time.[7] These movements were political projects, grounded in grassroots campaigns and counter-cultural actions.

To introduce members to the approach of social art we accompanied artist Isabel Lima to Gresham – a neighbourhood in the town of Middlesbrough which had undergone demolition processes. Isabel had been working with residents in the area on a long-term socially engaged art project alongside the arts organisation mima (Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art). We walked through the neighbourhood with Isabel on a grey winter's morning, seeing a neighbourhood paused. In some areas the weeds and grass had grown up over the roads, pavements and the foundations of the old houses, in other areas the houses still stood, but were abandoned. Some homes had been part demolished. Flowery wallpaper, fireplaces half way up the walls and tiled floors were now on the outside of the buildings. The private lives and aesthetic tastes of the people that once lived their exposed to the elements and to the city. We walked with Isabel across a wasteland peppered with broken TVs, dissembled bikes and abandoned mattresses and sofas.

We eventually arrived at a patch of ground that had been recently turned over and planted with flower seeds. The patch of ground was in the shape of a horse - 'Gresham's Wooden Horse,' a ten-foot-tall wooden sculpture of a Trojan horse created the previous year by Isabel and Gresham residents. This patch of ground was the first step in a planned community garden – a way to project forward from a difficult past in the neighoburhood.

Visiting a live project helped introduce Shieldfield residents to the principles and practices of social art. Yet whilst we were inspired by methods of social art practice, we also were wary. Social art may have had radical roots, but today, artists may be deployed as the foot soldiers of gentrification and displacement. There is also a possibility that community members are co-opted, or used as 'material' in social art projects, as my collaborator Hannah writes: "providing their stories, ideas, bodies, artefacts, and histories, and contributing a kind of 'authenticity' to the artwork"[8]. As artists and practitioners we were keenly aware of this danger. Yet by bringing together some of the tenets of PAR, we tried to avoid superficially *using* participation as a way to get what we, as professionals, wanted out of the project. Instead the project was about articulating what residents wanted and needed - we only provided the framework for this to happen, and for collective learning to occur through this process. As a result bringing social art into conversation with PAR has been a central way of critically using social arts practice, by making sure that community empowerment through knowledge building, is central to the work we do.

Working with these approaches, Dwellbeing was initiated in collaboration with a newly formed group of community members, composed of 20-30 people of mixed ages, and a local arts organisation – Shieldfield Art Works (SAW). Initial workshops and discussions with residents attempted to build a knowledge base about the current situation in Shieldfield through archival research, workshops with town planners, walks and litter picks, facilitating conversations between residents, local councillors and students, and trips to other neighbourhoods facing similar issues. We collectively built the project aims, values and methods, which were revisited at every meeting and which shifted over time. The main concerns that residents had in these early activities and conversations were about improving Shieldfield's public spaces, having things for young people to do and cross-generational activity. This led into activities such as the co-creation of a community zine called *Shieldfield Wave,* an archive box which reflected community hopes and memories, a design festival for a new community building, community fun days, children's workshops, gardening activities, trips and shared meals. These actions were

framed by fortnightly community meetings, which helped to reflect on, and plan, activities. These methods helped to understand the present situation, its causes and effects, and to move understanding of the situation beyond 'locals vs students' or 'residents vs local authority', to analyse the hidden systems and structures of power in order to connect local concerns with wider national and global realities.

Since becoming a constituted co-operative in 2021 Dwellbeing Shieldfield's three programmes have helped to direct the activity, based on what members, and the wider community, want and need. These include: 'Flourishing Together' - a social programme which offers weekly activities, such as coffee meet-ups, walks and trips, to bring residents together, share skills and organise. This programme is rooted in an ongoing exploration into alternative ways of organising, learning and solidarity; 'Shieldfield Youth Programme' (in collaboration with local arts organisation The NewBridge Project) which offers weekly sessional activity for children and young people to develop their skills and talents and to explore new ways of thinking and doing to empower them to become active members of the local community; and the 'Shieling Programme' (in collaboration with SAW) – responsible for the public realm aspects of Dwellbeing's work. This includes food growing, creating and sustaining community spaces and public realm improvements, as well as building community knowledge and engagement around the issues of food security, sustainable and participatory forms of building, land, planning and urban development.

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Fig. 8: *Shieldfield* Wave zine

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Fig. 9: Dwellbeing Shieldfield meeting

one hundred and thirty million pounds of earth: the financialisation of land

Sellotaped to Jacks's living room wall are newspaper cuttings and grainy images. As he sits in his 24-storey tower block, he looks at pictures of another 24-storey tower block far away in London. In the picture it is gradually burning. In that hot, dry June of 2017 a devasting fire ripped through Grenfell Tower in west London. In the pictures smoke and flames lick the insides of the building, plastic panels melt and drip a hundred feet to the street below, whole sections of cladding fall to the ground.

In late 2017 we sit in Jack's living room, sip our tea and stare at these images and I know he's worried. The total lack of control worries him. Jack wonders how this can happen. As a joiner he knows about materials. He understands that those plastic based materials are cheap to produce and cheap to install, just as the concrete panels in his prefabricated tower block were back then. "It's all about the money" he sighs.

...

The east end of Newcastle is thick with clay. In the back garden of my Tyneside flat I dig a big hole, digging deep beyond the top soil until I reached the ochre-brown clay. I use my fingers to shovel a piece into my hand. I squeeze it between by thumb and forefinger and the clay picks up the texture of my fingerprints. I dig a bit more and form it into a brick shape. I think to myself that it would be good for building.

I stand by the garage in Shieldfield and look across the street at the place where the old paintworks stands. The building retains its art deco features but is now student accommodation. I imagine the old clay pit and brickworks that once stood on this site. The deep pit with muddy ochre rainwater at the bottom and the kilns that would bake the bricks, ready for them to be used to build houses and factories across the region.

Architectural historian Wouter Vanstiphout writes that, "The past 15 years have seen the emergence of an entire generation of buildings whose character, scale and programme were not determined by new answers to contemporary questions, but by the manner in which they were financed"[9]. We can see this in Shieldfield. Student infrastructure plays a major economic and urban development role in towns and cities. Developers and investors have been quick to capitalise financially on this new market, which has seen rapid growth and is now estimated to be worth around £50 billion in the UK alone.

PBSA is now an important institutionalised property sector for pension funds, sovereign wealth funds and private equity funds.

Karl Marx argued that in order for capital accumulation to increase, the spatial and temporal barriers to the realisation of exchange values must be reduced. This means that the production of goods must happen more rapidly, meaning more commodities can be produced and more capital extracted in less time. In Shieldfield, this has translated into the fast, cyclic process of buying and selling land and PBSA buildings to new investor groups, but for the most part the value uplift of the land each time it is bought and sold is not captured locally – there is no UK land value tax and capital gains tax does not apply if the owner of the land is based offshore. Here value is accrued by pure inactivity – a central means of economic appropriation. This is where the true financialisation of urban space is realised – where profits are extracted through the process of financial exchange rather than the production of useful goods, or through the building of a new development. In Shieldfield this has happened to numerous PBSA blocks, sometimes before the building is complete. Albert Place, a brick slip and plastic clad building with 134 bedspaces, was sold by owners Crosslane Student Developments to a Middle Eastern investment group for £10.4 million only a few months after construction was completed. Each room in the development was in excess of £75,000. This is a tactic that Crosslane often uses to get quick returns. This example highlights that land's function as a financial asset takes precedence over its use value as a place to live, work or spend leisure time. Land is a particularly safe and lucrative place to store wealth because it has some unique features - namely that it is finite, you can't make more of it, and whilst other commodities decrease in value over time, may break or wear out, this is unlikely to happen with land. Whilst the price of land may go down during particular periods (such as a period of recession), it is always privy to rise again.

There is an obscurity in these processes of capital circulation, particularly when these are cross border. As commodities, we know that buildings are not just locally bound but are made up of materials, infrastructure, and increasingly finance, located elsewhere, whilst transactions are often completely detached from the physical place but happen in a sort of disembodied digital realm. Upending the 'obscurity' of development has been important for residents in Shieldfield. One of Dwellbeing's aims in creating community based knowledge, has been to work with residents to expose processes of development and patterns of landownership. In initial conversations with residents, people wanted to know where the money for developments came from, where the profit went to and how they might capture some of it for

the local community. So in 2018-19 we undertook a project with Masters of Planning students at Newcastle University to look at how and why PBSA buildings were developed, what actors and institutions were involved, who owned them and how much they paid for the land[10]. It was a large piece of work which involved analysing local and national planning policies and PBSA planning applications, interviews with developers, council officers, architects, residents and local businesses and analysing patterns of landownership and investment. The findings uncovered a local authority reeling from the effects of austerity, and having lost a lot of planning expertise, trying to kick start development but without the capital or expertise in house to do so. Money for regeneration had almost entirely disappeared and private sector led PBSA development seemed to be one of the only viable development types coming forward. We found that financial pressures have made many councils dependent on using undeveloped land to lever capital into cities, and to capture 'trickle down' public benefits which are often in the form of developer contributions or planning obligations[11] for infrastructure works, traineeships and open spaces. Yet in the case of Shieldfield, these financial contributions have often been spent elsewhere in the city - often in more affluent areas that have more green space and therefore could make more use of money ringfenced for biodiversity projects, as one local charity worker half joked: "Nobody could get access [to Section 106 money]. Unless you were standing in the middle of a field dressed as a tree with a worm going up your nose, you weren't going to get access to anything". Another resident stated: "We need some of that money. We are the ones that's putting up with all of that hassle but they won't give we the money to help try and change things. Do you know what I mean?"

Exposing patterns of landownership was central to this project. In the UK, the Land Registry is behind a paywall. It costs £3 to access a land title for a site. With money from the Planning Department at Newcastle University, we accessed land titles for all 20 student accommodation blocks which showed the owner and their location, the date that the land was bought, and the amount paid for it. We found that over 50 per cent of sites were owned offshore. We mapped this data physically through a large installation at SAW to visually expose this data. The artwork, named *One Hundred and Thirty Million Pounds of Earth* (the total amount paid for all the sites put together), tells the story of how Shieldfield has been caught in the middle of a global land and development market. Each of the new student accommodation buildings was recreated in miniature models using handmade bricks. Shieldfield's land is thick with clay, and it once had its own brickworks. Drawing on this history

of local brick production, as well as the particular formation of Shieldfield's soil, we created over 800 bricks through workshops with residents. Children pushed and squeezed the clay through the handmade wooden brick moulds, experimenting with adding straw and soil to change the clay's composition. They held up their mucky hands and laughed as they revelled in the mess. After the bricks had been formed by the mould they were stamped with the word 'Shieldfield' and left out to dry for a few days before being taken to the kiln at the University to be fired. We then built the models directly in the gallery, laying brick, mortar, brick, mortar, brick, in repetition. The size of each model corresponds to the amount paid for the land, with each brick worth £250,000, so the tallest buildings in the installation sit on the most expensive land. The artwork shows how the land market has fluctuated over time, as PBSA become more financially lucrative. In 2001 the first PBSA was purchased for £293,000, whilst the transaction value for the most recently completed development in 2018 was £18,493,730. The work lays bare the vast sums of money flowing through the neighbourhood which barely touches the estate. It highlights that the use of land as a tool of global economic growth becomes disembedded from cultural, symbolic and social values and historicity - the things that often hold meaning for local communities. As one resident stated after being involved in the artwork: "I've learnt that it's not the buildings that hold the value but the land". Exposing patterns of landownership has been key to residents being able to understand the global nature of development and specifically why it is not always just the Council or the local universities who are responsible for urban change.

Fig. 10: Brickmaking workshop

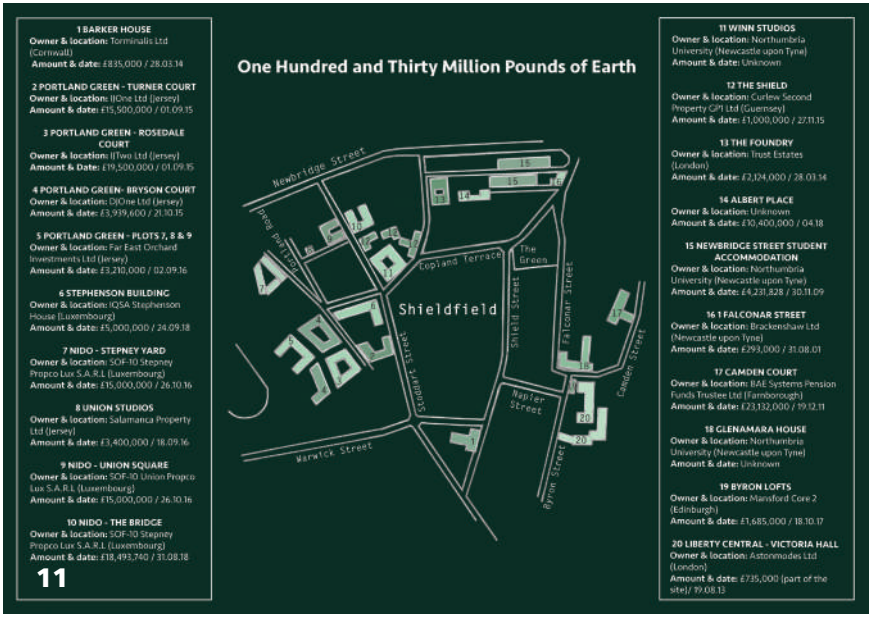


Fig. 11: Map depicting land-ownership patterns for PBSA sites in Shieldfield as part of *One Hundred and Thirty Million Pounds of Earth installation*, Shieldfield Art Works, 2019.

Figs. 12, 13, 14: *One Hundred and Thirty Million Pounds of Earth* installation, Shieldfield Art Works, 2019.

Fig. 15: Newspaper articles about student development in Shieldfield as part of *One Hundred and Thirty Million Pounds of Earth* installation, Shieldfield Art Works, 2019.

put your hands in the soil: connecting to the land

> When the land was still a piece of green land with four very old pine trees, when walking past I'd often go and touch the resin from those trees. The strong refreshing smell would cheer me up. Then I walked past and did not find the trees in their normal shape. It felt to me like a few healthy happy old persons had been killed for no reason.[12]
>
> To remember the history, to reclaim the stories of the land, only then can you revision the stories of the future… Land underpins everything… land injustice is more prescient but less visible in an urban context… A sense of place and… stewardship, rather than ownership, does not come from a capitalist model.[13]

In Shieldfield there is a sense of disconnection from the land, stemming from the rapid redevelopment of the neighbourhood against the wishes and needs of existing residents. In some cases this has led to person-place alienation,

what Deborah Bird Rose has termed 'wounded space'[14]. People feel sad and angry at the community resources lost within this process of transformation – whether this be the social club, pubs, residents' groups, or neighbours who have moved away. With social networks and community resources bypassed, there has been a sense of dislocation for existing residents. Sergio Ferro writes that segregation is a mental and physical framework that sustains capitalism[15]. It colonises the mind, making community harder to form. We can see this happening in the case of Shieldfield. A pamphlet on the history of the neighbourhood written by John Armstrong notes that when Shieldfield was redeveloped in the 1960s and 70s neighbours struggled to restore "the values of the lost community [...] because of the uncertainty of the time and the movement of the people."[16] He highlights that "[t]his is the problem of today, the uncertainty of security in the communities, people have become isolated from each other and gradually the old landmarks of Shieldfield are vanishing."[17] He associates the physical changes in the neighbourhood with the mental changes in the minds of the residents – people don't feel that they have the *right* to take ownership over, or even use, Shieldfield's land. The land is somehow external to them, instead of being part of their being, both individually and collectively.

Writer and activist Alastair McIntosh, suggests that person-place alienation is historically produced through ongoing forms of enclosure and capitalist expropriation of space. He writes that, particularly in urban areas, there is a lack of understanding about how land has been removed from people. This can be seen most recently in the selling of public land and the demolition of council estates[18], but we need to look further back in time to truly understand where the disconnection between urban people and land emerged from. Industrialisation in the nineteenth century saw the emptying of villages as hundreds of thousands of agricultural labourers moved from the countryside to the cities to work in growing industries. In 1750 nearly 80 per cent of the British population lived rurally, but by 1850 that number was just 50 per cent. At the same time, due to industrialisation, the population of Britain rose dramatically, from 9 million in 1801, to 13.9 million in 1831 and 32.5 million in 1901[19]. This enormous and rapid growth meant that agriculture needed to increase its output in order to feed a growing population. In *The Making of the English Working Class,* E.P. Thompson describes how workers moved to the cities because their rural livelihoods were made increasingly difficult due to the enclosure of lands[20]. Parliamentary enclosure consolidated strips of land which were cultivated by different villagers in the open field system into compact field units by erecting hedges and fences, thereby enclosing much

Fig. 16: Cherry tree cut down on a development site.

Fig. 17: Shieldfield Green.

of the pasture commons or 'wastes' which villagers relied upon to graze their livestock and gather fruits and fuel. Enclosure was meant to improve the efficiency of agriculture and increase the value of the land (which was becoming increasingly important due to the population increase) and make it easier to keep livestock (at the time wool was financially very lucrative). However, landless workers were left with parcels of land that were inadequate to survive on, and in village after village enclosure destroyed the subsistence economy of the poor and the social fabric of places, as people moved from countryside to city. Whilst the self-governing and customary elements of lives from a pre-capitalist time still existed in many rural places, enclosure imposed capitalist values on the village. Thompson writes that, "The loss of the commons entailed, for the poor, a radical sense of displacement"[21]. This happened in Shieldfield too. Tracing the history of Shieldfield John Armstrong writes:

> The field had been common land where people could keep cows or other animals and a few hens, and they could catch the wild birds or rabbits in the winter time… the common land helped the poor people to survive in the winter times. From 1738 onwards the Shieldfield changed into a closed land by the laws of the land Enclosure so now the poor people of Shieldfield had no rights to the land of Shieldfield, the field now belonged to the property of Lord Ridley.[22]

Alasdair McIntosh goes even further back in time to highlight the role that Roman Christianity had in denying place-sensitive identities, forcing people to understand their identity as constrained within the body, separate from any place. He says:

> They stripped the earth from being a central aspect of people's identity and turned it into private property, they interpreted the land as inanimate, as uncommunicative, as a mere resource to be exploited. These things have brought about a fundamental separation of people and place and this has led to an internal psychological collapse whereby you lose your moorings in life and these forms of trauma knock on from one generation to another, unless they are understood and start to be resolved.[23]

Understanding how land has been removed historically from people in order to resolve our present-day psychological detachment from it has been vital to our work in Shieldfield. Further to this, many residents of Shieldfield have lost their lands and homes in recent times. Many migrants live in Shieldfield who have been displaced by war or lack of opportunity, so reconstructing attachments to land requires not just a historical frame but importantly a *cultural frame*. Therefore there is a need to think about the land and processes of displacement, disattachment and development both historically and culturally in order to understand place alienation. Only by understanding how land has been taken, enclosed and removed from collective use and care, can communities begin to rebuild a collective right to urban space. As one Shieldfield resident stated, the connection between urban land and building community is vital: "We can't magic green space, but we can keep the little bit we've got left and just rebuild".

thinking with the land

On a rainy February morning we grabbed our bags and went out into the neighbourhood. We pushed our fingers into the textured brickwork, seeing how the wavy lines repeated across the buildings. We made rubbings with thick coloured crayons, scrubbing the paper on the bark of trees, walls and pavements. A Sudanese child sat in the rain patiently drawing the decorative window of an old church. We look long and deep at surfaces, colours, shapes and forms. The horizontals and verticals that shape how we move across the neighbourhood. We walk silently through the drizzle, as it goes

on and on and threatens to turn to sleet. Our feet are wet and we go inside, warming ourselves up with hot drinks and biscuits.

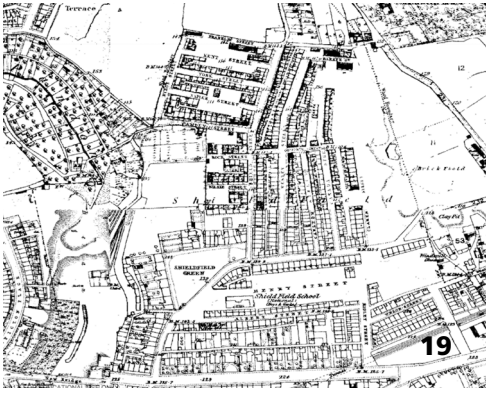
In asking 'How to think ourselves into the land?', Brian Wattchow and Alex Prins highlight that learning arises through story-telling and experience in indigenous cultures[24]. Youngsters are taught about the land by walking through it and sensing the body in the landscape. Through the Shieling Programme we undertook a project to develop a locally led vision for future urban development in the area by collectively researching the histories and cultures of Shieldfield and undertaking tactile engagements with the landscape. Alongside artist Sara Cooper we worked with local school children to look at old maps of the area to understand how it had changed. We saw where fields were cut up and parcelled to make way for industrial housing, brickworks and ropeworks. These parcels then became industrial units, then student housing. Little lanes became streets and the beautiful Pandon Burn was filled in by layers of tarmac, concrete and rubble. It's still alive and running somewhere underneath the Central Motorway. There were orchards of apples and pears which became roads and pavements. There was a windmill, a manor house and another lost river. A running track now sits on top of the old tip and the old fort was replaced by Christ Church. The last remaining slice of common land - Shieldfield Green - was divided and offered to landowners[25]. As John Armstrong writes: "The Shieldfield was still in the country, all land outside the town walls was recognised as country", as the boundaries of the city expanded and grew. Through old maps the children began to understand the development of the land, and how the layers of its history can shape their relationship to place today. Tying a washing line across the school hall we traced Shieldfield's timeline together. The children added dates and events, going as far back as we could, using the first map in existence of the city – Speed's map of 1610 which shows a windmill in the centre of what is now Shieldfield. 1723 saw the first surveyed plan of Newcastle by James Corbridge and in this 'The Shieldfield' is depicted with only its orchards and ropery. We then traced streets being built on top of fields and orchards and existing tracks and lanes, grand homes to house the wealthy and then mass housing for the industrial working class. Our timeline traced the growth and many waves of development in Shieldfield.

With both children and adults we undertook a deep study of Shieldfield through sensory walks, in order to understand how the specific colours, shapes, textures and ecology that make up the neighbourhood

Fig. 18: James Corbridge's map from 1723 showing the fields and orchards of Shieldfield and Pandon Dene and the ropery.

Fig. 19: Ordnance Survey map from the 1860s showing Shieldfield with growing numbers of terraced houses for its industrial working class population.

Fig. 20: Children looking at old maps.



Previous page
Fig. 21: Photographing colours and textures.

Fig. 22: Drawing patterns from the landscape.

On this page
Fig. 23: Making surface rubbings.

Fig. 24: Printed wallpaper made using textures from Shieldfield's urban landscape.

Fig. 25: Looking at a mosaic at the old British Paints building in Shieldfield with ecologist Mike Jeffries.

Fig. 26: Shieling Design Day.

could shape development in the future. We did this through physically engaging in the fabric of the neighbourhood - taking photos, drawing, making surface rubbings and clay reliefs. During collective walks we stopped at different locations in Shieldfield and asked: How does this place smell? What colours and shapes can you see? What textures can you feel? What can you hear when you close your eyes? What happens when you look up? Through the act of rubbing a finger across the rough brickwork, observing the lines that run up and down and from side to side across the landscape, raising an eye to the air, lying on the ground, walking silently through the streets, we were using the 'land-as-teacher'[26] to understand how it can shape our future interactions and developments in the neighbourhood. The aim was to use these interactions to shape plans for the physical future of the neighbourhood to counter the generic architecture of recent years.

We carried these body centred engagements in the landscape into a new art residency and commission with Sara. Sara worked closely with the Shieling Programme to research the history and plant life of one particular area of the neighbourhood that lies next to the Pandon Burn which lays at the bottom of the Pandon Dene[27] which was some 22 metres deep and 130 metres wide. Once described as a "A very Romantick Place full of Hills and Vales"[28] it is now hidden underneath the motorway. Sara spent time with residents, walking around this area and undertaking drawing activities. They worked with a botanist to identify the plants growing here, observing the weeds growing between the gaps in brick walls where the mortar has been worn away by the weather. Amongst a mass of greenery they found a rare form of hogweed. Sara imagined how the area might have been laid out in the past with its dene, woodland, river and pasture and, later on, as a place famous for its gardens and orchards. The commission led to us planting a wildflower meadow in the outline of one of Shieldfield's historic water mills, which were once on the banks of the Pandon Burn. On a freezing November weekend we measured the outline of our site, cut the turf and shovelled mulch on top of the top soil. A few days later, in the darkness of a coming winter, when the clocks had just gone back, we gathered local children to spread the seeds under torchlight. In summer 2022 the meadow tentatively bloomed. In 2023 it found its stride. This living artwork, entitled *Reimagining Pandon Dene*, will flower year after year and shows the physical impact that Dwellbeing is beginning to have in the neighbourhood. Accompanying this, we collected the drawings made by residents and gathered them into a booklet about the residency.

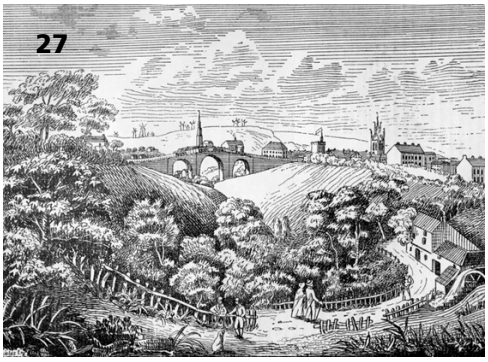


Fig. 27: A view of The New Bridge, Pandon Dene 1821, engraved by John Knox from a painting by John Lumsden.

Fig. 28: Mustard manufactory, Pandon Dene, etching.

Fig. 29: Ink drawings of plant shadows.

Fig. 30: Digging turf for the wildflower meadow.

Fig. 31: Sowing the seeds of the Reimagining Pandon Dene wildflower meadow by Sara Cooper.

Fig. 32: Wildflower meadow in bloom.

shieldfield grows

She plants a new fig tree underneath the tallest tower block. She doesn't ask permission. She just digs. The tree looks strange, this non native piece of greenery, its shadow stark against the painted concrete wall.

In the summer we take control of the public planters. We pull out the crisp packets, drinks cans, and cigarette butts. We try and cleanse the soil by removing little pieces of plastic that have degraded over the years and are now mixed up in the soil. I wonder to myself whether plastic becomes the soil sometimes. We cut back the buddleia - the plant of the edgelands, of the forgotten places. It grows in the brickwork of the planters and forces apart the mortar, compromising its structure.

A boy with a growing Geordie accent insists on carrying the compost. He stands precariously on top of the planter with a big spade in one hand, moving the new compost back and forth, making sure it's evenly distributed across the planter. His brothers and sisters shout out of the window from their flat above, their sofa throws, sheets and towels hanging to dry out of the window. They ask him what he's doing. They bring water in empty Coke bottles to feed the seeds. We sew sunflowers and harvest the seeds after they flower and die back to plant the following year.

Putting our hands in the soil and tending to the landscape productively has become a vital way to re-engage residents with the land. Many Dwellbeing members were unfamiliar with growing, as one member said, "I was born in the city, I grew up in the city. I never see anything growing, apart from

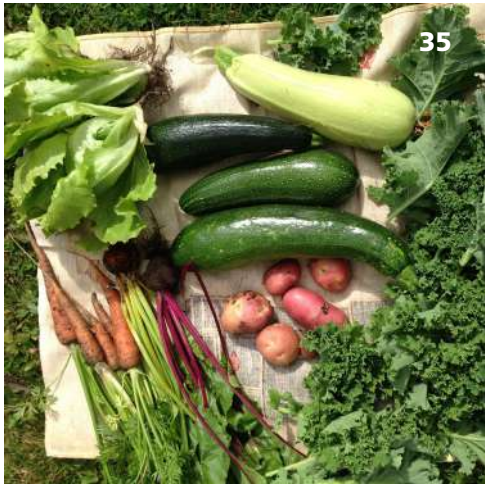


Fig. 33: Identifying plant species on a neighbourhood walk with a botanist.

Fig. 34: Planting garlic on the Winter Solstice.

Fig. 35: Produce grown in the garden at Shieldfield Art Works by residents.

Fig. 36: The garden at Shieldfield Art Works.

Fig. 37: Planting a new tree.

what I read in books… I thought you only grow things in the farm!" During the first Covid lockdown of 2020, alongside SAW, Dwellbeing started a food growing programme which supported 30 families to grow food in their flats, houses and gardens. We provided seeds, pots, compost and basic growing know-how. This has since expanded into a growing programme called *Shieldfield Grows*, which involves an 'adopt a plot' scheme in the community garden at SAW, so those without space to grow at home are given a planter to grow in, and are given the tools and knowledge to do so. We have expanded this activity into the estate, growing vegetables, herbs and flowers in the many public planters, and there are monthly community meals and visits to community gardens to expand our collective knowledge around growing. Because Shieldfield is such a multicultural area, residents have learnt about different approaches to growing and cooking, and share gardening stories, recipes and knowledges through community meals. The Shieldfield Grows Whats App chat is full with neighbours sharing photos, tips and stories about their growing experiences and is also a vital space to organise this activity. We have also produced booklets that draw on these activities to share our learning beyond the confines of the neighbourhood. These include booklets on seasonal recipes, using herbs for wellbeing, pickling, preserving and drying produce and seed saving. Through Dwellbeing's Shieldfield Community Seedbank seeds are swapped with other community gardens and growers in the local area, which has opened up conversations into fair land use and urban food security.

This programme also aims to reconnect people to the rhythms of the land and the seasons, through new festivals and celebrations. In October the fruit and vegetable harvest is celebrated through a festival with music, food, craft activities and competitions. Alongside the Harvest Festival we celebrate the Summer and Winter Solstices on the longest and shortest days of the year. Each year garlic is planted on the Winter Solstice which is then harvested at the Summer Solstice. The darkness creeps in during the months of November and December in Newcastle. Last year the darkness was coupled with freezing fog on the Solstice. We sheltered our chairs and tables for the celebrations underneath the flats on stilts and braved the cold to put our hands in the soil to plant the garlic bulbs. With these moments of celebration we keep connected to the cycles of nature and in touch with the natural world – a vital aspect of building new relationships to the land. The revitalisation of a new sense of culture within the neighbourhood is also important. So much of the traditional working class social life of the neighbourhood has been lost as part of the redevelopment process. But Shieldfield is also now a highly multicultural area, so 'reviving' some sort of lost culture is no longer possible or desirable. Instead we are interested

in how new festivities can help to communicate many forms of living cultural heritage, drawing on the variety of nationalities in Shieldfield to create new festivals and points of celebration that people from many different places can connect to. Our focus on the rhythms of the natural world helps with this, as they are not tied to a specific religion or place, and most cultures have festivities connected to the growing season.

In their work on how first generation migrants attach to place, Clare Rishbeth and Mark Powell highlight that cultural values and practices both persist and are adapted within new locations. In our work we have found that memories are triggered by acts of gardening and growing produce, as well as preparing food together[29]. Shieldfield resident Ahmad speaks about growing fruit and vegetables at his family farm in Syria whilst Kaltouma gets sent African herb seeds through the post from family in Sudan. Ken grows Chinese herbs in her front garden to help her health. She boils them up to make aromatic teas – a memory from her childhood in China and Hong Kong. During lockdown Candy didn't go out at all. In her cupboard an old sweet potato started to grow shoots and she remembered that she used to buy sweet potato leaves to eat from the farmers' market in Hong Kong. So she put her old sweet potato in a pot with some soil and it started to grow leaves. She cut the leaves and cooked them with noodles. These experiences show that attachments to the land are not just formed locally, but through memories, experiences and perceptions from places that are much beyond the local.

Becoming empowered to transform where we live requires us to know ourselves, our places, our histories and cultures. There is a need to reforge the links between community and the land, particularly in urban areas where land seems so far removed, but becoming sensorily connected to the land through physical actions can help to rebuild collective knowledge about our places.

developing a critical consciousness

> We've been promised so much… we think that there are different ways of doing things that can work and can bring new life and power for the people of Shieldfield to make their own decisions.[30]

> *People care about what is theirs, what they can modify, alter, adapt to changing needs and improve for themselves. They must be able to attack their environment to make it truly their own. They must have a direct responsibility for it.*[31]

Co-operative values are central to how Dwellbeing works. Sergio Ferro offers a route to resistance for worker and dweller through alternative modes of production such as care, co-operation and autonomy. For Dwellbeing, this sense of co-operation goes beyond that of person-to-person connection, it also encompasses a sense of reciprocity between humans and the natural environment which places humans not outside of, but very much part of, nature. Murray Bookchin's work on 'social ecology'[32] is especially helpful as he shows that the very idea of dominating nature is connected to the historical emergence of hierarchies, and later to the breakthrough of capitalism. In order to create an 'ecological society', Bookchin states that there is a need to abolish hierarchy from the human condition, but first we need to confront and challenge all hierarchical relationships (including the human-nature binary). I would posit that there is a need to go further, and first begin to *understand* these hierarchies in order to abolish them. Understanding and acknowledging the different *types* of power relationships is key to overcoming them. John Allen's work into the various modalities of power highlights how power concretely emerges in place, through discourse and actions between people instead of being an abstract, ubiquitous force[33]. This is what he calls 'power in proximity'. In this account power is both positive and negative. 'Instrumental power' (power held over someone) can transform into 'associational power' (power held collectively). Associational power can enable people to work towards a common aim, through for example, the production of community-based knowledge and understanding. Dwellbeing's focus on building collective knowledge about the systems that produce our buildings and spaces have helped residents in Shieldfield to understand the structural factors at play. Creating a grounded understanding of the various policies and practices that create our spaces – whether this be national or local planning policy, systems and structures and land ownership patterns, has been vital in stimulating bottom-up co-operative action to take place. In this section I use examples from Dwellbeing to probe how these practices can lead to 'conscientisation' - the process of developing a critical awareness of one's social reality – understanding the power relationships which you are controlled by. This type of informed action is important to support people and neighbourhoods to become more autonomous and resilient to future change. As one Dwellbeing member said when talking about growing food: "I didn't think to try, because I didn't know how". It is only when we 'know how' can we try to build better, more sustainable futures.

planning for the future: shieldfield strategy

Building knowledge to help deal with future urban change has been central to Dwellbeing's work in Shieldfield. In the current planning process, plans and urban transformations have happened beyond the realm of the community. In the interviews that Planning students undertook, one councillor stated that, "now, the vast majority of local business happens in closed meeting rooms". There is a general feeling that financial incentives influence decision-making, with one councillor stating that, "everything is tilted towards the developer", whilst one resident said: "I think money talks, I think once big business and big money offers are there… they're not going to take any notice, the plans are there and they're going ahead anyway". One local business owner stated, there has been a "cycle of being let down and ignored", of "broken promises". Without robust systems of consultation and communication between councils and residents, debate is foreclosed, and those places with less resource and capacity often get omitted from decision-making. The weight of policy in decision-making meant that when objections were raised, planning officers referred to policy to make a final judgement. As a result, the centralised nature of the planning system, the reliance on developer contributions to stimulate wider neighbourhood change, and the impacts of austerity, have created need for what one planning officer called "short term fixes", instead of planning for long term, sustainable communities. But it was not only the quality and intention of consultation that hindered residents from effectively objecting, we also found a lack of planning literacy amongst residents. Whilst residents could frame the impacts of PBSA, they struggled to interpret these within policies. There was clearly a need to develop planning literacy within the community in order to impact policy.

Over the last two years Dwellbeing has developed a strategy for planning in the public realm which foregrounds residents and the natural environment. We worked closely with architecture firm HarperPerry and two local trainees – Mahamat Younis and Amin Goodarzi, who gained first-hand experience of urban planning and architecture. Traineeships are a central aspect of Dwellbeing's commitment to build community-based skills and knowledge. They worked closely with the Shieling Programme to create a new public space strategy for Shieldfield. The Strategy developed out of numerous walks, workshops, events and festivals organised by Dwellbeing. Amin and Mahamat undertook a public realm exercise to map key open spaces across Shieldfield. Residents were then asked to comment on these spaces in their current condition and how they might be better used. We used an online platform to gather comments and, for those without access

to the internet, meetings were held at the local community cafe to talk people through the process and allow them to comment. Following this, a series of workshops were held in person between November 2021 and March 2022 where different groups were asked about what changes to the neighbourhood they might prioritise. A Car Free Day event involved closing one of Shieldfield's streets to traffic and sought to promote alternative modes of transport. The event included arts activities, sports, food stalls, mapping activities and information stalls. We placed planters at each end of the street to stop the traffic, and between them erected gazebos. Children chalked the road in colourful letters writing 'No car day. Walk. Ride a bike or a bus'. They ran up and down the road, making huge paintings on big strips of wallpaper, getting paint on the road which the adults hastily tried to clean up. At one end of the street there was a giant game of chess and a bike that powered a smoothie maker. Kids wiggled their bodies inside hula hoops, their faces painted with colourful designs. There was a big map of the neighbourhood so residents could comment on areas that need improvement. This event was coupled with community walks and workshops focusing on housing and transport issues. Some recurring aspirations emerged through these activities which included the want to reduce traffic and pollution, to improve community and play spaces for young and old and to make sure Shieldfield's community had agency in decisions about the future of the area. These main aspirations created the framework for a series of proposals under four key themes: Environment, ecology and green spaces; Community and local economy; Housing and Services, transport and infrastructure. Each of the proposals considered within these categories is framed by a presiding concern with the climate crisis in order to make Shieldfield a socially and ecologically sustainable urban neighbourhood. The Strategy includes proposals for small scale interventions, such as new street furniture and more opportunities to support natural habitats (for example more hedges, nesting boxes, birdfeeders), to medium scale ideas, such as the development of new landscaping in underused green spaces, the creation of new informal gathering and play spaces for residents and new public artworks, to the large scale, such as creating a dedicated community space, creating a community network of water to aid public growing activity, developing a community energy network which includes more renewables and a strategy for housing which would look to sustain existing communities, minimise wasteful demolition and promote retrofit, and enable and support community-led housing where there is a need and desire.

40

Fig. 38: Workshop to identify key aims for the Shieldfield spatial strategy.

Fig. 39: Participatory mapping activity to help build the Shieldfield Strategy.

Fig. 40: Online public space survey.

Figs. 41, 42: Activity at the Car Free Day, September 2021.

On a hot Monday evening in August 2022 we invited local stakeholders including council officers, architects, local businesses, charities and developers, as well as the community to the launch of the Strategy. Residents sat alongside those in positions of political and economic power in the city. There was a feeling in the room of *care* - that despite what had happened in the past, many people and institutions cared for Shieldfield, and wanted to make things better for the future. Over Ethiopian food freshly cooked by a local resident we collected contacts and promises of help to enact our strategy. Architecture and planning trainee Mo introduced the strategy – his voice directed at those in positions of institutional power. This kind of self-representation is a core principle of PAR because it can subvert existing hierarchical structures about 'legitimate' knowledge and experience. These tactics can be a vital tool collapsing embedded perceptions about people and communities and highlighting the real abilities and know-how of people who are not experts in the field. As we have found through creating this Strategy, organised forms of participation in the urban environment can help communities intervene into space and enable them to advocate for wider access to resources. Further to this, as in the case of our trainees, this can also catalyse new life trajectories through processes of learning, confidence building and self-representation. The ability to show the Council and other stakeholders in the city that Shieldfield residents themselves now have the ideas and the knowledge to intervene into urban space has been a vital part of this work.

There is much more work to do before the Strategy is enacted, but for many in Dwellbeing it was the process of creating the plan and building knowledge about the planning system that was a breakthrough moment for them. Ivan Illich, the anarchist social commentator, believed that due to the growing professionalisation of the social realm, people had given over their vision of the future, or in this case of the city, to a 'professional elite'[34]. Planning is seen as an 'expert' area of urban administration that is not easily influenced by lay people and this has been a key frustration for residents in Shieldfield. There is inevitably a need to use expertise to help build collective and community-based knowledge about the systems that produce our buildings and spaces, and to help people to understand the very processes and relations that have created the problem (of gentrification, or rapid urban development) in the first place. We have found that understanding the planning and development process is key to influencing it, so building planning literacy within the community was vital. The more we understand about planning and get involved in the process, the more opportunity we have to deliver a community vision for the neighbourhood. So alongside the Strategy we created a 'Community Planning Companion' – a guide to understanding the planning system. This booklet draws from the experience of

Shieldfield to share knowledge about how the planning system operates, the key actors, main policies and alternative approaches to mainstream planning. A central part of this guide is how to submit comments and objections to planning applications, and importantly, what points may be deemed 'immaterial' or irrelevant to planning. It is only by building planning literacy and the knowledge about how and why we build within the community that it may be possible to safeguard the needs and wants of residents for the future.

Figs. 43, 44: Launch of Shieldfield Strategy.

slowing down

Sergio Ferro discusses the need to concretely experiment with the possibilities of emancipatory practices. There is a need to do this urgently, but also to understand that there is a slowness that is required, which builds trust in communities that have been broken, or that have had acts of social violence placed upon them over time. We live in a world of policies, regulations and procedures that are sometimes difficult to understand if we are not experts. In order to create lasting change, there needs to be a focus on collective knowledge and skills building, to firstly understand what has happened, why this has happened, and only then, what might be done about it. Unless people understand the systems that have produced the issue, it is difficult to understand how a situation can be transformed for the better.

But it is also the *relational* that is important in this – how the community works together with the wider political structures in the city to bring about change. Whilst local authorities can be slow, bureaucratic and regulatory, doing things in the public realm requires partnership working. Whilst these relationships

can be tense (especially in a place like Shieldfield that has been 'done to'), they need to operate in a space of negotiation, with each partner both giving and receiving. Coupled with the employment of local knowledges and lived experiences, this is how we intervene into the 'wider political structure' to trigger change. As resident John Armstrong said in an event to launch the Shieling Programme:

> "We have got to shine through the windows of these doors, we can't… build up a community on wor own, we have to have a relationship with those outside… we have the knowledge, we have different talents, different education. Bringing all that together can be a powerful light in the community, all we need today is to blend everything together".

What John describes requires long term thinking and doing. He went on to say, "We don't need 'projects', but 'to pro-ject'" into the long term future by facilitating lasting actions that create real communities of practice. It is the everyday-ness of the actions which is important here, as resident Ken stated, "For everyone to love where they live is very important. If we have a community, it's kind of finding your soil to put your roots down. I believe that is important. And also, community is everyday life, not just for a project, or a party." The long term nature of the work that Dwellbeing is doing is vital to create a neighbourhood more resilient to future change, which reflect the needs and desires of residents.

epilogue

The Pandon Burn runs deep underneath our feet. If we dig down through the layers of mud, waste and rubble, we get to the water. One day we'll open the big Dene back up. We'll cut through the concrete that culverts it in, that weighs it down. We'll paddle in its cool waters and cross the stepping stones to the other side. We'll picnic on its banks and stroll through its copses.

But for now we scatter the wildflower seeds beside it in the growing twilight. We take torches and lamps to light our way in the growing gloom. The children laugh as they stamp their feet across the freshly seeded soil.

The shoots make tentative growths, up and up, following the direction of the tower blocks into the sky. We run our fingers through the flowers as they bloom. They defy the Council grass cutter. They stand up good and strong. Every year more will come, the seeds will spread in the wind across the neighbourhood, landing in the cracks of paths, in the overgrown planters, in the gaps between the roof tiles. Every year they will multiply and grow. And this place will bloom.

notes

1 Interview with resident, 2018.

2 'Indefinite leave to remain' is how you settle in the UK. It's also called 'settlement'. It gives you the right to live, work and study here for as long as you like and apply for benefits. It can be used to apply for British citizenship.

3 See www.dwellbeingshieldfield.org.uk

4 www.dwellbeingshieldfield.org.uk

5 John Armstrong, *Canny People of Shieldfield* (2005) no page.

6 Sara Kindon, Rachel Pain, and Mike Kesby, eds., *Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods: Connecting people, participation and place* (Oxon: Routledge, 2007).

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10 Wouter Vanstiphout, 'The self-destruction machine' in Fulcrum, *Real Estates: Life Without Debt* (London: Architectural Association, 2014) p. 60.

11 Julia Heslop, Josh Chambers, James Maloney, George Spurgeon, Hannah Swainston and Hannah Woodall, 'Re-contextualising purpose-built student accommodation in secondary cities: The role of planning policy, consultation and economic need during austerity' *Urban Studies* vol. 60, no.5, 2023, pp. 923–940.

12 Developer contributions/planning obligations include Section 106 requirements and the Community Infrastructure Levy. Through these legal mechanisms, councils secure financial and non-financial contributions from developers to mitigate the impact of, and support, development, including affordable housing, schools, green spaces, other infrastructure works and local training opportunities.

13 Interview with resident, 2018.

14 Mairi McFadyen, spoken at an event to launch the Shieling Programme, 2019.

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21 E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 2002 [1963]).

22 Ibid, p. 239.

23 John Armstrong, *Canny People of Shieldfield* (2005) no page.

24 Alastair McIntosh, Presentation for Radical Performance Knowledges webinar series + Place and Performance Research Group, University of Leeds, 'Land Consciousness: What can England learn from Scotland about Taking Back Control?', 22nd March 2019. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2g-hUa07zc&ab_channel=stageatleedsDigital> [Accessed 13.09.23].

25 Brian Wattchow and Alex Prins, 'Learning a landscape: Enskilment, pedagogy and a sense of place', in Howard, P., Thompson, I., Waterton, E. and Atha, M. (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Landscape Studies*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2018) pp. 102-112.

26 It is said that whilst imprisoned in Newcastle during the English Civil War in the 17th century King Charles used to play golf or 'goff' there. The area was officially enclosed in 1738 and only the small triangle of land survived as common land. By 1750 most of the land had been adopted by adjacent landowners.

27 James Raffan, 'The Experience of Place: Exploring Land as Teacher'. *Journal of Experiential Education*, vol.16, no.1, 1993, pp. 39–45.

28 A dene is a steep-sided wooded valley through which a burn runs.

29 Henry Bourne, *History of Newcastle-upon-Tyne* (Newcastle upon Tyne: John White, 1736).

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34 John Allen, *Lost Geographies of Power* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003).

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