UNDERSTANDING PRIDE IN PLACE

A place-based creative **Think Kit** from Feeling Towns
by Nicky Marsh, Michael Howcroft and Joseph Owen

In this **Think Kit**:

1. A place-based approach

2. Planning fieldwork

3. Creative methods

4. Reflection and evaluation

5. Resources

This **Think Kit** is for anyone who seeks to engage people about pride in place. It uses creative methodologies and takes a place-based, co-production approach.

We hope it will be particularly useful for:

Local authority officers

Community groups

Academic researchers

Creative practitioners

Arts organisations

Arms-length bodies

Government departments

Policymakers and strategists

With these groups in mind, this **Think Kit** aims to:

Explore collective methods and metrics for understanding pride in place.

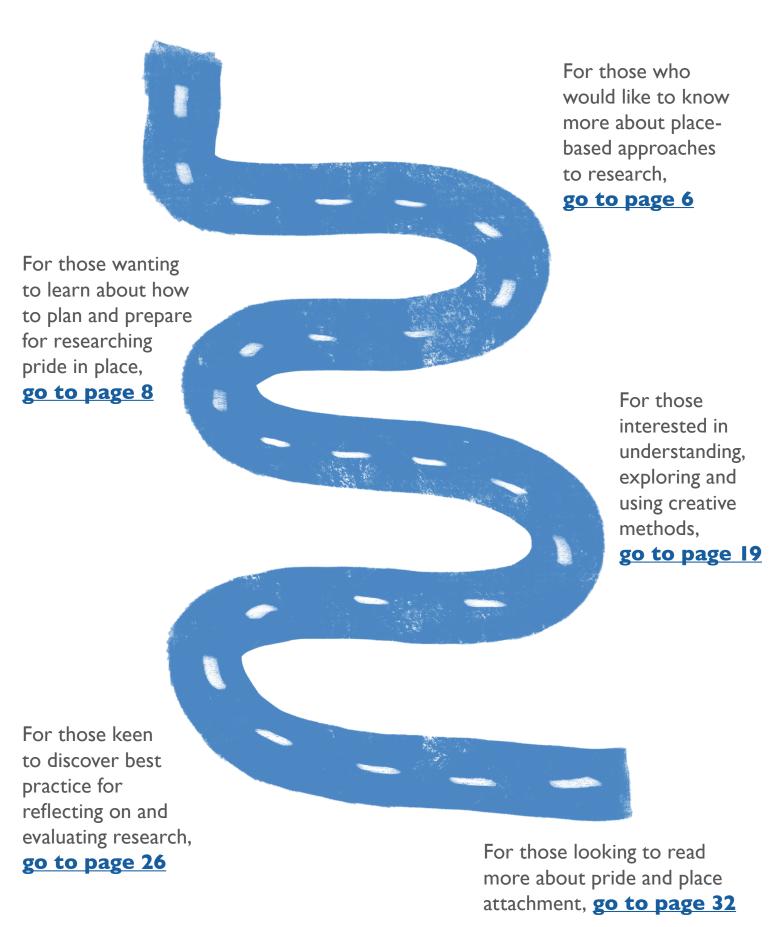**Share** qualitative approaches to understanding investment in culture and regeneration.

Cooperate across multiple political and policy realms engaged in the "Pride in Place" agenda, by sharing findings and influencing policymaking.

Create new understandings of the complex roles that pride, place attachment and civic engagement play in local decision-making.

This place-based approach can support existing stakeholder knowledge, frame the rationale for policy, and develop the strategic case for n.eighbourhood-level interventions.

How to use this **Think Kit**:

For those who would like to know more about place-based approaches to research,

For those wanting to learn about how to plan and prepare for researching pride in place,

For those interested in understanding, exploring and using creative methods,

For those keen to discover best practice for reflecting on and evaluating research,

For those looking to read more about pride and place attachment,

Meet the team:

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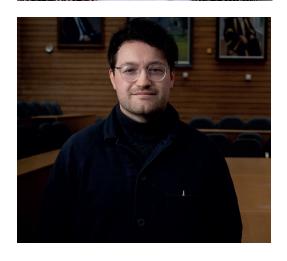
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With thanks to our partners:

DARLINGTON Borough Council

RURAL MEDIA

Historic England

SOUTHAMPTON CITY COUNCIL

What is our project?

Feeling Towns is an Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) knowledge exchange project led by the University of Southampton. It explores the role of place and identity in governance and local policy, sharing knowledge to better understand the relationship between pride, civic engagement and place attachment.

What is a place-based approach?

There are multiple ways to learn about places and how different policies affect residents' understandings of place. Our place-based approach builds on a scoping project, "Towns and the Cultural Economies of Recovery",[1] focusing on the relationships between the tangible and intangible elements of place:

» **Physical spaces such as buildings and parks**

» **Social conditions within a defined neighbourhood**

» **The relationships within communities**

» **And the public and private services that determine people's lives**

By considering many factors of people and place, it offers detailed understandings about communities at the neighbourhood, or "hyper-local", level. This approach is key for understanding how pride influences people's specific attachments to the places where they live, work and volunteer.

What is pride in place?

"Pride in place" is a term intended by policymakers to capture people's satisfaction in their local areas.[2] It is increasingly used to understand the types of activities with which people engage in their communities. It also functions as a measure of place-based policy, such as the Levelling Up agenda, the UK City of Culture and Historic England's High Street Heritage Action Zones. Beyond this definition, pride includes a variety of felt, emotional and relational responses people have about where they live.

Why should you use a place-based approach to understand pride in place?

Pride in place is a complicated emotion: it works at a variety of interconnecting scales, e.g., national pride, civic pride, and local pride

» **It interacts with other forms of pride, such as pride in one's job or in one's group identity**

» **It has a fragile temporality: it comes and goes quickly, and can lay dormant for a long time**

» **It is the product of many overlapping, complex relationships and histories**

Pride is therefore partial and subjective, making it difficult to "capture" and accurately represent by traditional methods. It is not always fully articulated by people themselves. Questionnaires and surveys rarely allow for this complexity, and measuring emotion through proxies such as wellbeing, crime and housing does not actually take account of the experience of pride.

Here and now

The financial crisis of 2008, Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic and Levelling Up have provoked tough questions about people's feelings, affiliations and identities, and have brought into focus their impact on unequal geographies. They have also revealed a lack of appropriate methods to understand them. Novel and geographically specific approaches are required to understand the impacts on people in place, especially those which can develop views "on the ground" or "from within".
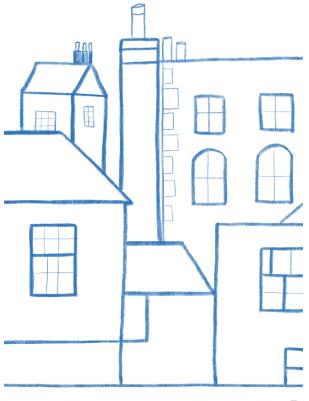
Creative methods

Engaging with residents in innovative ways is crucial to successful co-production and consultation. By being creative with new and established ethnographic methods, we can better understand the needs of communities. In particular, they allow participants to express feelings and ideas that are not always easy to put into words, they allow researchers to ask deeper questions in response to participants' unique stories, and they take account of the simple fact that every place is different.

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CASE STUDY

Our research partners have told us that they want to learn how to engage with residents in ways that will help them understand their feelings of pride in place beyond surveys, questionnaires, and proxies.

2.

Planning fieldwork

Planning and preparation are essential before you undertake any form of community engagement, and particularly if you want to learn more about pride in place. In this section, we offer some key considerations for your place-based research and fieldwork.

Ethics are crucial to any piece of research. You should take time to consider the possible ethical issues which could arise throughout a place-based evaluation or research project—and to do this at the earliest possible opportunity. These considerations include confidentiality and privacy, as well as concerns about reproducibility and research quality. Undertaking qualitative research, especially when researching emotions, leads to subjective interpretations and conclusions, which makes the reproducibility of data more difficult to maintain.

What documents will you need for participants?

An outline of your research project that states:

» **Who you are**

» **Why you are conducting the study**

» **What participation in the study involves**

» **How you will protect participant's personal data**

» **How you will anonymise their responses**

» **Flyers/handouts including your contact details**

» **A list of methods that you intend to use**

» **Consent forms for each method**

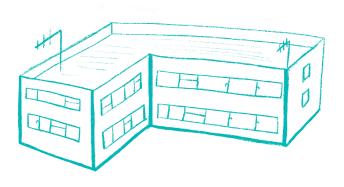» **Participant information sheets for each method**

TOP TIP

Place-based researchers must consider many different factors that depend on the context and subject of their work. Here, we offer some practical solutions from the *Feeling Towns* project. But these examples are only a guide: your research will have its own set of needs and requirements.

Safeguarding

Clearly explain to participants the nature of your research and the methods you intend to use. Provide them with a **participant information sheet**, in which you should give details of any psychological or physical discomfort, distress and other adverse effects that they may experience during and after your study. State how you intend to alleviate these issues if they do arise. Questions and conversations about people's lives can bring up difficult experiences and memories. Be mindful that people may feel pride in their local area, but this might be because of personal reasons. They may have other feelings, such as shame, anger and fear.[3]

Informed consent

Prospective participants should be asked to sign a **consent form**. Their personal details must remain strictly confidential. Research findings made available in any reports should not include information that can directly identify a participant without their specific consent. If your study includes research with children under 18, an appropriate adult must provide informed consent. It is good practice to obtain parent/guardian consent as well as school permission.

Consent form example

I have read and understood the interview participant information sheet 17/05/2022/V2 and have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.	
I agree to take part in this research project and agree for my data to be used for the purpose of this study.	
I understand my participation is voluntary and I may withdraw (at any time) for any reason without my participation rights being affected.	
I understand that I may be quoted directly in reports of the research but that I will not be directly identified (e.g., that my name will not be used).	
I understand that special category information will be collected about me to achieve the objectives of the study - which include understanding issues of equality, diversity and inclusion within local authority cultural decision making.	
I understand that taking part in the study involves audio/video recording which will be transcribed and then destroyed for the purposes set out in the participation information sheet.	
I give permission for the personal data and special category data that I provide to be held by Southampton University as described in the participant information sheet so it can be used for future research and learning in relation to towns and cultural planning.	

Anonymity

Responses should be anonymised to avoid personal identification and to protect participants from having their identity disclosed. This point matters, because your findings may occasionally present conflicting views about local issues, and it is imperative not to jeopardise your participants' professional relationships. While participants can be cited anonymously within reports, you can also provide a full, separate list of contributors, if required. When they are discussing pride, people may have personal stories and private views that they do not want in the public domain.

Data management

Under data protection law, "personal data" means any information that relates to and can identify a living individual. Personal data collected from your study should be used only for the purposes of carrying out your research and handled according to data protection law. If any personal data is used from which a participant can be identified directly, it cannot be disclosed to anyone else without their consent. To safeguard their rights, you should use minimal personal data to achieve your study objectives.

Triangulation

Triangulation means using multiple **datasets, methods, theories, and investigators** to address a research question. Using different methods and perspectives helps to develop a more detailed, comprehensive picture of the people and places you seek to understand.

This type of research strategy can help you to increase the validity and credibility of your findings. Triangulation can include:

» **Qualitative research:** You conduct in-depth interviews and focus groups with different types of stakeholders.

» **Quantitative research:** You conduct surveys and questionnaires with other researchers and analyse the data.

» **Mixed methods research:** You conduct both quantitative surveys and qualitative structured interviews.

By combining these approaches, you can begin to pose and answer questions like:

What does pride do?

How will understanding pride lead to better decision making?

What does pride mean to local communities?

Does pride correlate with social capital?

Does raising levels of pride in place increase educational attainment?

Language and definitions

It is important that you and your participants understand the vocabulary of your research into pride in place. The meaning of pride is often historically situated, culturally dependent and place specific.

Understanding the context of your research is also vital. **"Levelling Up"** is currently a key slogan for place-based research. It should be understood within a longer history of political phrasemaking that frames policies, initiatives and government decisions in response to post-austerity politics. Although the phrase "Levelling Up" could indicate redistributive policies, it is more often linked to political funds directed at different types of places.

More specific yet transferable languages are required that can develop frameworks for measuring pride in place—and other indicators of place attachment—beyond the limited understandings that currently exist. Some people in Southampton didn't feel Levelling Up was "for them" as it was about "the North".

'Messy' fieldwork

Fieldwork is often messy and complicated. However much you plan and prepare, circumstances can easily change during your research. Participants could misunderstand what you are asking of them; they may no longer wish to take part; you may find that different methods are needed to obtain the information you want. During fieldwork, there is a value in **"just being in the field"**,[4] using the time in places to both understand and reflect on the needs and wants of different communities. Through fieldwork, you will often learn how to better reshape your research question and subject focus. You may come across unexpected sources of people's pride or, indeed, shame.

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CASE STUDY

We found in our research that the term "pride" is not obvious for communities: many did not understand the phrases "pride in place" or "civic pride" and conflated these with LGBTQ+ pride.

Research sites

A research site is a place where you conduct your research into pride. Selecting relevant research sites can depend on several factors, including:

» **How residents in a proposed site for redevelopment feel about the plans**

» **How communities understand cultural and service assets on their own terms**

» **How communities understand policy impacts in their neighbourhoods on their own terms**

» **How communities identify as part of a local government funding submission**

» **How residents understand their community as "deprived" or "in need"**

» **How communities understand their area and how it maps onto political wards and constituencies**

» **How residents feel their area is perceived by others who do not live, work or have ties there**

» **How residents feel about the notion of "community" and the power of civic engagement**

Thinking longitudinally

Community engagement on pride is a long-term project. Interviews with stakeholders often uncover challenges in mapping a region, in understanding how pride is acquired, in developing strategies for understanding pride in place, in evaluating impacts of hyper-local initiatives, and in securing sustained investment for community development and cultural regeneration beyond responsive-mode funding. Shaping and interpreting this data calls for cross-disciplinary approaches and closer attention to the complex heterogeneity of towns and cities. This takes time.

Facilitator skills

Facilitating creative activities is vital for allowing voices from across the community to engage in places and for allowing researchers to see in real time how these relationships and cultural ecologies operate in such places. These methods allow researchers to support non-traditional and relational assets such as lived experience, networks, ideas, innovation and creativity. [5] Towns and cities can have a narrow collective vocabulary for imagining possibilities of renewal or transformation.

Places with an emphasis on a single narrative about themselves struggle to imagine the futures in plural or inclusive ways. There is often an "official story" [6] that dominates a place and people's feelings towards it. We underline the value of **learning creative methods and developing facilitator skills** for opening alternative spaces, modes and idioms.

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CASE STUDY

Feeling Towns visited cultural organisations and communities in Darlington, Southampton and Herefordshire, where we ran workshops and conducted fieldwork with stakeholders including volunteers, charities, Council officers, local community groups and residents.
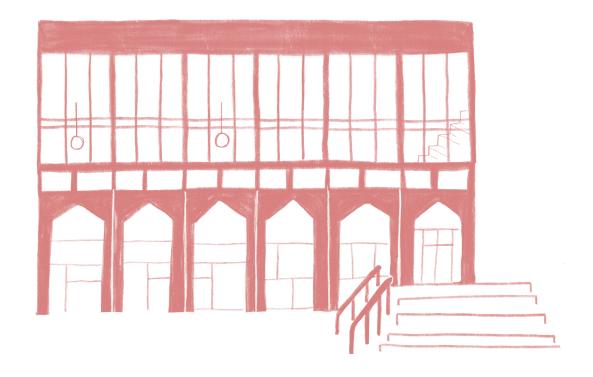
Stakeholder scoping

Identifying relevant stakeholders is crucial for your research. In a place-based approach, stakeholder mapping usually develops ad hoc. While key partners can be addressed through official meetings and workshops, engaging individuals and communities often happens through informal yet established networks. These discussions are key for building relationships that will help you to comprehend how pride is viewed and understood in places.
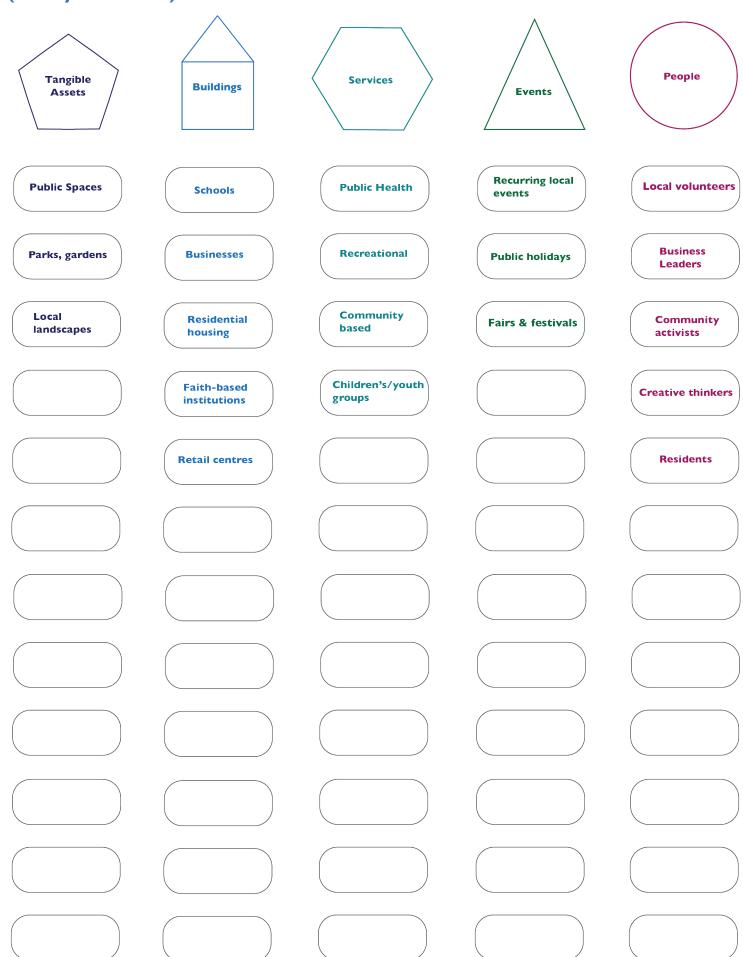
Asset mapping is a useful starting point from which to build a wider understanding of residents' views and the existing community groups, institutions, services and events that exist in a place.[7] From an initial listing exercise, it is possible to expand on your identified institutions through **experience mapping**, capturing their community scope and reach. These exercises can be conducted on a regular basis over a long period to meet the evolving conditions of places. **Please try some examples of these mapping techniques on the following pages…**
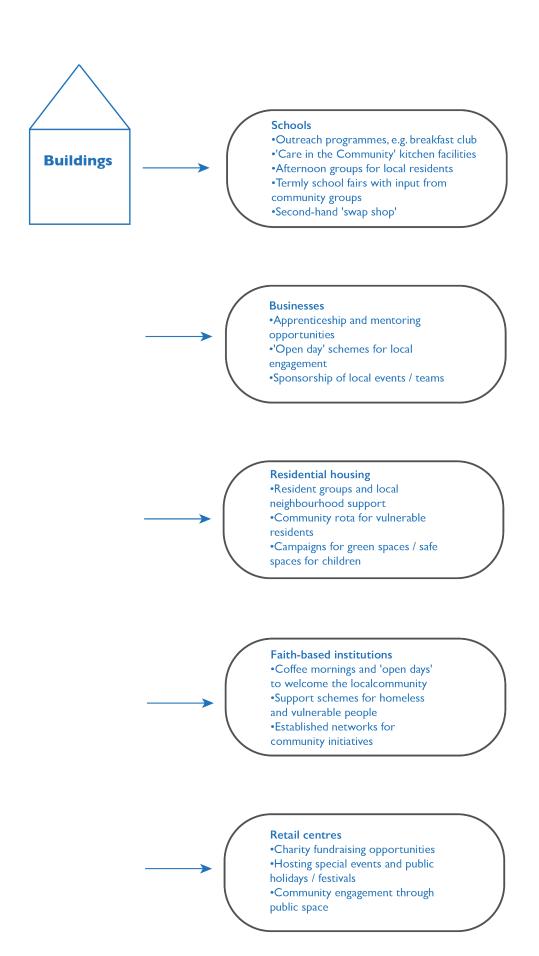
TOP TIP

Through stakeholder conversations, you can find active community members with whom to collaborate "on the ground". In our Darlington fieldwork, we connected with a food charity to engage people in one area of the town, where residents were traditionally harder to reach.
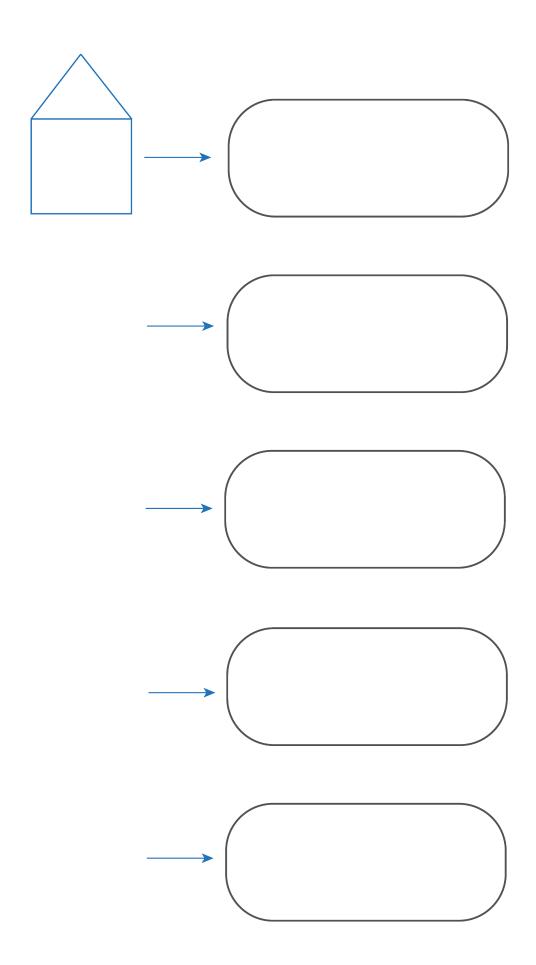
Activity: Initial Activity Checklist
(Add your own!)

Tangible Assets	Buildings	Services	Events	People
Public Spaces	Schools	Public Health	Recurring local events	Local volunteers
Parks, gardens	Businesses	Recreational	Public holidays	Business Leaders
Local landscapes	Residential housing	Community based	Fairs & festivals	Community activists
	Faith-based institutions	Children's/youth groups		Creative thinkers
	Retail centres			Residents

Experience mapping example:

Buildings

Schools
- Outreach programmes, e.g. breakfast club
- 'Care in the Community' kitchen facilities
- Afternoon groups for local residents
- Termly school fairs with input from community groups
- Second-hand 'swap shop'

Businesses
- Apprenticeship and mentoring opportunities
- 'Open day' schemes for local engagement
- Sponsorship of local events / teams

Residential housing
- Resident groups and local neighbourhood support
- Community rota for vulnerable residents
- Campaigns for green spaces / safe spaces for children

Faith-based institutions
- Coffee mornings and 'open days' to welcome the localcommunity
- Support schemes for homeless and vulnerable people
- Established networks for community initiatives

Retail centres
- Charity fundraising opportunities
- Hosting special events and public holidays / festivals
- Community engagement through public space

Activity: Now try your own experience mapping

Next Steps

So far, we have been describing tasks that you will likely conduct in your office and quite possibly on your own. In the following section, all the methods we describe will require you to work "in the field".

Before conducting fieldwork, you should study social, economic and demographic data about the community and place you intend to visit. This work will allow you to think about whether creative methods are suitable for your project. You should consider questions like:

» **How is the area represented in the local news and national press?**

» **Are there any live issues, any safety issues, or any issues that might cause participant bias?**

» **What are the levels of educational attainment?**

» **What might be the challenges and opportunities when working "on the ground"?**

You must also reflect on the researcher's position in relation to the place of study. Community responses will vary depending on whether you are **viewed as an outsider or an insider.** These conditions may limit the amount people tell you, the nature of what they tell you, and the extent of your findings. Bearing these points in mind, the creative methods outlined in the next section intend to give prominence to participant voices and thereby mitigating demand characteristics and biases.

3.

Creative methods

Creative methodologies enlarge our capability to imagine futures, to develop and evaluate policy, and to engage multiple perspectives and stakeholders. They present an important tool for moving from consultation towards genuine co-production with local communities, boosting participation in place development and policy.

First, some things to think about:

» **How is the room arranged? Are you face-to-face or sat in a circle? During the event, how is power being distributed?**

» **Make sure everyone gets a chance to speak**

» **Make sure everyone understands and is ready to explore the key terms of your research**

» **Emphasise non-judgemental approaches**

» **Be playful, creative, and 'fun', but be wary of manipulating participants**

» **Use warm-ups and icebreakers**

» **What will participants take away with them from the research? Knowledge, understanding, agency?**

In the following section, we outline four of our project methods…

Emoji Mapping

Photo elicitation

Timeline drawing

Poetry workshops

Emoji mapping:

Using a laminated map of an area, the task is to ask residents to tag emoji stickers on places where they have a strong connection, memory or feeling, and to ask them to explain their reasons for doing so.

Benefits

An easy, interactive and engaging approach for participants

Elicits rich qualitative data when participants explain their choices

Participants respond to others, leading to productive discussions

Challenges

Emojis can be subjective and contain multiple meanings

Requires the researcher to be stationary; not easy on the move

It can be hard to identify locations; some areas may not be included

Photo elicitation:

Using photographs, taken by the researcher and uploaded onto a tablet, the task is to ask residents to respond to pictures of their local area. For prompts, you can ask questions: What do you see? What used to be there? What can you imagine there instead?

Benefits

A portable method that can cover many participants in a short time

Suggestive pictures can provoke imaginative, detailed responses

Useful tool for identifying key sites of regeneration in communities

Challenges

Can be difficult to show photos on a tablet in sunny or wet weather

Requires a careful curation of images to avoid repetitive data

Showing run-down local areas can be overstating and insensitive

Timeline drawing:

Using a pen and paper, the task is to ask residents to identify moments in time when they felt proud of living in their local area, writing down or providing illustrations for these responses on a timeline.

Benefits

Shows how participants' views and feelings develop over time
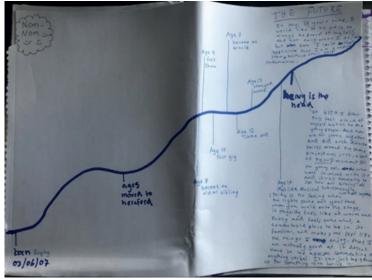
Allows for written and drawn responses to memory and place

Encourages participants to think about and imagine the future

Challenges

Difficult to start and sustain in busy places with many people

It is a time-sensitive method that requires focus and patience

The emphasis on a timeline can discourage responses on place

Poetry workshops:

Using a pen and paper, the task is to ask participants to write down questions and answers about pride in place. Using scissors and glue, participants cut up their responses and match them with others to create a poetic collage.
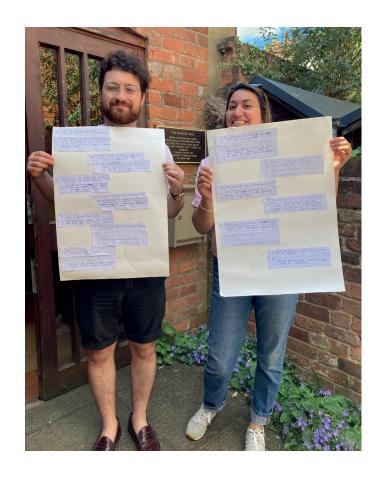
Benefits

Using poetry allows for thoughtful, nuanced responses and reflection

Novel focus on language and form expresses different ideas on place

Creating an artefact encourages non-judgemental collaboration

Challenges

Emphasis on poetry can side-line discussion about pride and place

Invites self-selecting participants that can produce narrow datasets

Takes time and resources to publicise, organise, host, evaluate

Our poet-facilitator during the Feeling Towns project, Joanna Nissel, explains[8] the rationale for the poetry workshop method:

"Rather than quiz people in an interview setting, we wanted to find out whether a more fluid, creative approach allowed volunteers to better express how and why they feel the way they do."
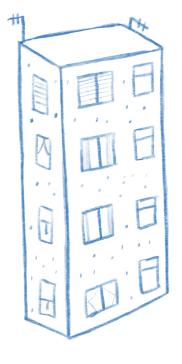
The act of making the poetic collage can be entertaining and insightful for both participants and researchers:

"The composition of the poem - combining lines to represent experiences of the local area - revealed the nuances of civic pride, the impact of cultural events, and what it is really like to be a volunteer in places today."

Creative methods need to be flexible, as they depend on many factors: the participants, the situation, the researcher's experience and confidence, and the subject of your research. Some topics might not be suitable for our methods. Face-to-face, in-person research means that some participants might feel uncomfortable disclosing personal and potentially highly sensitive information. In these cases, think of supporting your study with a remote option—such as an online or paper survey—which can be completed in private, reducing potential embarrassment, anxiety or stress.

Be open to surprises but have a clear idea of what you understand as data. Your research should be verifiable and transparent because these factors will produce robust findings and credible reporting. In our case studies, creative methods were used to open a safe space for critical discussion on pride in place.

ACTION POINT
You've conducted your research.

What's next?
In the following section, we offer key points about reflecting on and evaluating your work.

4.

Reflection and evaluation

How would you benefit from reflecting on and evaluating your practice?

Collaborations with arts, humanities and social science researchers develop missing capacity in local communities and provide fuller understandings of pride in place through:

» **Inclusive practice**
Sharing models for practice-based research can enable creative and participatory decision-making and governance.

» **Medium term planning**
Short timeframes for funding bids make it difficult to understand and support community needs. Medium-term co-production on self-evaluation, planning and imagining futures can address these needs.

» **Meaningful community engagement**
Sharing models can better connect diverse communities, encourage meaningful civic participation, and build community cohesion.

» **Innovative, longitudinal research**
Novel creative and interdisciplinary evaluation methods, drawn from new models of longitudinal research, can show the changes in people's feelings of pride over time.

Reporting back to stakeholders

If possible you should report your findings back to partners, who will want to know how you have used the information they have shared with you. It is also useful to gather evidence that shows the impact your work has had on stakeholder planning and practice. This type of reporting and information gathering illustrates the need for **better connections between regional stakeholders** because "a more permeable relationship between universities, their industrial partners, and the wider community […] develop[s] skills that feed into productivity". [9] Working together, institutions can begin to more effectively understand the complexities of pride in place.

Sharing findings imaginatively

Stories and "storying"—simply, ways of telling stories—are fundamental to the way that humans make sense of the world: to understand who they are and where they fit in. The practice of urban or town planning can be thought of as a form of storytelling. Stories and, importantly, re-storying, are key elements of the creative place-shaping toolkit. There is significant potential for harnessing storytelling to **imagine future places and inform policy.** People often have long-standing, intimate and affective relationships with places. It is crucial to understand how these views are shaped through individual and collective narratives.
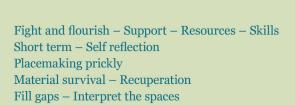
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CASE STUDY

On an earlier project, we worked with community artists to creatively share findings about pride in place. The artists were briefed on the central research questions, the scope and the key terminology. They brought unique creative skills and approaches to the workshop design and delivery. Each workshop had different activities. Participants in Boscombe worked with photographs and maps, whereas participants in Darlington worked with words and doodles to create miniature books—from which one of our collaborators devised a poem (see next page). Details, images and artefacts produced from the workshops can be hosted at local venues and disseminated online.

Darlo Matters

A lyrical Essay composed by Lisette Auton from discussion with Darlington residents

Fight and flourish – Support – Resources – Skills
Short term – Self reflection
Placemaking prickly
Material survival – Recuperation
Fill gaps – Interpret the spaces
Placemaking with a string of pearls

How do you capture how people feel?
Loneliness and isolation
Community – Care – Pride – Include
Heritage and celebration
Human Capital – Digital literacy – Co-production – Giving back
What are our other pasts?

Welcoming space
Everything comes at a cost
Needs don't just stop
Not agreeing is good - a community is being built

Level up... What then?
How can the gap not be bigger than ever?
Involving the residents
Name groups, specifics, don't blob us all together
Levelling up is the idea of the left behind

What is the value of pride?
Alternative – Circular – Gift – Donut
Sustainability – Economy – Natural accounting
We measured our value in sheep and sacks of wool
A complex mosaic – A promise written – Emotional dynamic
Sustainability – Economy – Whose Heritage?

The small scale of local imagining
4 1/2 minutes with the chancellor - no metric on which to judge
How do we measure success?

Agricultural capital – Global capital – Mercantile beginning
Quakers – Entrepeneurs – Flaxtastic
Horses - Bondgate
Cattle - High Row
Gaggle of geese - Prospect Place
16 pennies depending on age and beauty - buy yourself a cat

Sunshine on the railway line
He lived in Domino's pizza parlour -
most important building in the history of the world
Best Kebab One -
Edward Pease, Father of the Railways met
George Stephenson, Father of the Locomotive
Guardians of the line

History of railways dominate Darlington
Prize our other histories
Heritage and culture – An alternative future
Change up the narrative – A stake in the area
Combatting loneliness together
Honour the stories told – Fill in the gaps
Who had the power?
How do you make a grand building a space where people feel
they can cross a threshold?

Market town – Sport – Garden Street
Quaker heritage – Allotments – Food
Skerne Valley – Beekeepers – Railways
Town centre – Football club – Nightlife
Large parts in need of regeneration
People – Place – Skills
Symbiotic relationships – Tensions tangible
How do we get the most out of things?

Become more than the sum of their parts
Skills gaps – Want to branch out
Narrow – Disadvantaged – Unemployment
Knowledge sharing – Understanding – Day to day living
Look more widely
Resources and engagement – Challenge of the short term

Shaped by attitudes – Let down by those in power
Focus on what we have now and the future
How will it look?
How can we make it together?

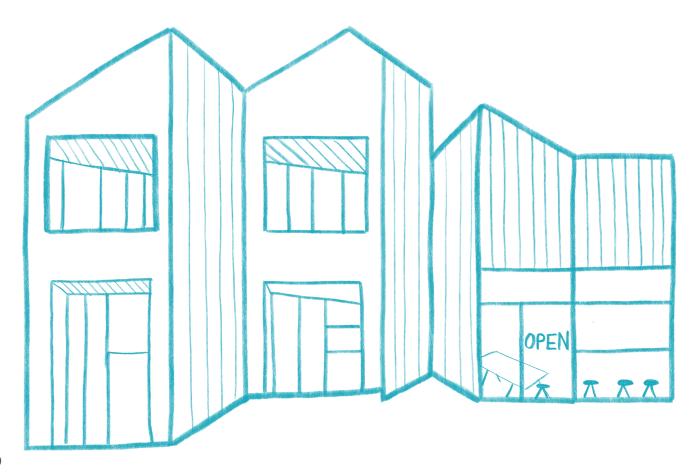## How will you engage us?

Monitoring responses over time

The tools for understanding and measuring civic pride are—like other affective metrics, such as wellbeing—relatively undefined and unexamined in many policy documents, practice and evaluation. **Civic pride, place attachment and civic engagement play vital roles in governance**. A critical account of these factors offers a sharper understanding of the values and aspirations that local political and community representatives pursue. While this work is difficult, it should not be ignored.

Integrating evaluation into funding bids

It is crucial to build sustained reflections and evaluations of pride into place-based funding bids. The standards for inclusive community-based consultation and evaluation differ widely, and communities are often not enabled to imagine new futures. More longitudinal studies are needed. Data collected to measure the impacts of new developments and regeneration schemes on people's pride in place is often piecemeal and incomplete. Yet this data can support **expressions of interest, funding applications and investment plans.**
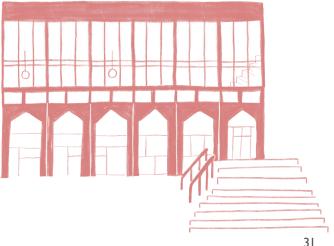
Research-led approaches

This **Think kit** has drawn together findings from across applied research and research-led practice, as well as from policy and more traditional academic disciplines, where there have often been missed opportunities for interdisciplinary, cross-sector, collaborative dialogue. This combined approach to collaboration is essential for **understanding people's pride in place within hyper-local communities.**

Finally, it is worth noting the following important findings from the *Feeling Towns* project:

1. It emerged that participants and policymakers had very different understandings of how to define and what was meant by "pride in place"

2. We addressed this disconnect by offering our own definitions of "pride in place", which we left as open, multiple and descriptive

3. We tried not to be proscriptive in our research so that participants could interpret "pride in place" at whatever scale was meaningful for them

5. References

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