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ASSESSING THE MERITS
OF PLACE QUALITY INTERVENTIONS
AS AN APPROACH TO NEIGHBOURHOOD
REVITALISATION

Abstract: Over recent decades a hegemonic discourse of competiveness has scripted places as directly competing with one another for capital injections. It is against this backdrop that the notion of place quality, or more specifically the qualities of a particular place's factors of production and consumption, appears to have gained significant international policy traction. Nevertheless, the role of place quality – precise or otherwise – in the success of neighbourhood revitalisation efforts continues to be elusive. Theoretically and empirically the regenerative capacity of place quality remains highly contested. This discursive arena and urban phenomenon is therefore an area of academic enquiry, policy development and practice crying-out for much needed analytical attention. Through the case of Sunniside in the north east city of Sunderland, England; this paper examines the nature, scope and role of place quality as a vehicle for neighbourhood revitalisation. The findings of a four year research project reveal that place quality strategies have primarily been deployed as a legitimating tactic by politicians and the public sector at large to deliver early urban transformational 'wins'. The case is made that prevailing quality of place revitalisation schemes are justified on the back of serving the many but in practice tend to conceal the disproportionate benefits accrued by the few; particularly land owners, investors and developers.

Key words: Place quality, neighbourhood revitalisation, symbolic regeneration, economic competitiveness.

Introduction

The place quality revitalisation model evident in urban design and planning policy discourse across diverse international settings often scripts a development trajectory whereby economic competitiveness and social justice go hand in hand [Chang, Huang 2011; Pugalis 2009a; Trip 2008]. Grounded in the understanding that places *compete* in a globally competitive terrain, the qualities of a particular places factors of production

and consumption are viewed by many policymakers and place-shapers as more crucial than ever. Quality of place is therefore being positioned as paramount to sustaining long-term urban competitiveness as localities compete in 'place wars'. Yet, beyond the oratory, symbolic gestures and material efforts is often a political project that seeks to selectively recycle, revalorise and revitalise discrete urban neighbourhoods.

The aim of this paper is to document the nature, scope and role of place quality as a potentially regenerative force. Through a four year inquiry of the neighbourhood revitalisation of Sunniside, Sunderland in the north east of England, the paper argues that it is common practice for place quality strategies to be deployed as a legitimating tactic by politicians and the public sector at large to demonstrate early regeneration 'wins'. Sunniside, represented by the policy community as 'the forgotten merchant city of Sunderland', is purposely selected as a lens through which to investigate the role of place quality. Not wishing to position it as an exemplar project, Sunniside does nevertheless expound an interesting place quality revitalisation approach that utilised new designs to *capitalise* on built heritage and other place *assets*. In this respect, it presents a window into contemporary urban regeneration practice. The situated issues that are analysed are likely to bear similarities to those of places in other parts of Europe and beyond. Consequently, the conceptual discussion, policy implications and practical lessons are of relevance beyond Sunderland. This is where the study has wider resonance and can provide understanding of some broader trends, albeit in a more constricted fashion.

Using Sunniside as an entry point in terms of urban politics, governance and policy, the paper draws on original research with people in the frontline of a neighbourhood undergoing 'revitalisation', including residents, visitors, surveyors, planners, designers, politicians, investors, business owners and employees. Material was amassed from the practices, experiences and imaginations of these frontline agents of change, which involved qualitative interviews with policymakers, 'on-street' conversational interviews to access *local knowledges*, observation of a participatory and non-participatory nature in the decision-making arena and in the field, and analysis of documentation. The case is made that prevailing schemes are justified on the back of serving the many but in practice tend to conceal the disproportionate benefits accrued by the few [Amin *et al.* 2000]; particularly land owners, investors and developers.

The remainder of the paper is structured in five parts. Firstly, the role of place quality is briefly conceptualised, which provides the study with a theoretical underpinning. Secondly, the urban pocket of Sunniside is introduced and the contributory role of Sunniside's development trajectory in acquiring a reputation in the late 1990s as 'a place in need of resuscitating' is examined. Thirdly, the role and remit of the delivery body set-up to lead the place quality revitalisation strategy, Sunniside Partnership, is investigated and some 'early wins' are identified. Fourthly, 'Brand Sunniside' is assessed, and the contradictions between the lived space of Sunniside and the discursive conceptions of space flowing from official channels are highlighted. Fifthly, the paper closes with a synthesis of the major findings.

1. The contemporary role of place quality:
a Murky concept

The debate about the role of place quality and its regenerative capacity remains highly contested. 'Quality of place' is a relatively new concept, which is gaining importance and interest at a number of spatial scales and tiers of political administration. The concept is now politically salient, but this vigour may be more aligned with economic objectives than with improving quality of life [Campbell 1981]. Perhaps because the concept is still at a formative stage, it is not yet fully understood but its popularity indicates that it has emerged as a crucial development paradigm.

The place quality concept entered the policy lexicon and regeneration practitioners' vocabulary in recent years through a process of fast policy transfer from the works of Richard Florida and his 'creative class' theory [Florida 2000, 2002, 2005]. In particular, the publication of Florida's [2002] *The Rise of the Creative Class* has become something of a public-policy phenomenon [Peck 2005]. Gaining almost instantaneous global appeal, many cities latched onto the creative class thesis, which spawned an army of 'place shaping' professionals [Pugalis 2010]. Whilst a critical dialogue with Florida's universalist creative class indices and direction of causality continues [see *e.g.* Brown 2010; Krätke 2010; Malanga 2004; Peck 2005], this has not diluted its policy appeal [Pugalis 2009b]. Indeed, the application of the creative class thesis has tended to be extremely partial, with many interventions focussing on a limited toolbox of physical measures. At its basic level, the 'quality of place theory' asserts that a creative environment attracts capital – primarily in the form of investors (ie. residents and businesses), tourists and consumers – which stimulates further investment attracting more capital and creating a self-reinforcing upward spiral. According to Florida, the highly mobile and spatially selective creative class seek out and are attracted to creative milieus – places possessing a bundle of qualities including ethnic diversity and social tolerance, distinctive architecture and designscapes, and a vibrant streetscene and cafe culture. As Richard Florida argues, 'the city [now] allows you to modulate the experience: to choose the mix, to turn the intensity level up or down as desired, and to have a hand in creating the experience rather than merely consuming it' [Florida 2002, p. 232]. What is also instructive about the quality of place paradigm is that symbolic qualities play a crucial role alongside more traditional functional qualities (use value) and productive qualities (exchange value) [Debord 1983, [1967].

The 'qualities' of places, bound up with diverse social relations, political ideologies and economic forces, therefore emerge as an exploitable economic tool in the ongoing process of capital accumulation. Transpiring from this are the highly uneven processes of spatial (re)structuring, (re)ordering and (re)production. With this in mind, Florida asserts that place quality is a critical factor in the economic functioning of places; not only important as a vehicle for neighbourhood renewal and economic revitalisation but also 'as a prerequisite for attracting talent' [Florida 2002, p. 17]. There is perhaps a confusion in the direction of Florida's creative causality index, where diverse and tolerant societies are

not in themselves creative but such dynamic social compositions tend to be conducive to creative talents (Montgomery 2005). However, this is entirely the point which Florida is trying to make; that distinctive urban neighbourhoods are *attractive* to the 'creative classes'. The policy message is that places need to attract this new class and can do so through upgrading their place assets. By inference, Gibson & Brennan-Horley [2006] observe that 'less creative' people and places are represented as 'problematic'. Indeed, as place quality inducements proliferate any anticipated returns are likely to reduce [Pugalis 2008].

The study *Human Capital, Quality of Place and Location* refers to quality of place as the bundle of goods and services that come under the broad rubric of amenities (Arora *et al.* 2000). Amenities are encapsulated not as a mere fleeting phenomenon but can be more appropriately thought of as the inherited, acquired, and built-up characteristics of places including everyday culture and services, leisure and recreation, and infrastructure. Quality of place is therefore a mixture of natural and man-made amenities, where the precise constellation will be dependent on the particular place. Andrews' analysis of quality of place defined the term '…as an aggregate measure of the factors in the external environment that contribute to quality of life, which in turn can be defined as a feeling of well-being, fulfilment, or satisfaction which residents or visitors hold to such a place' [Andrews 2001, p. 201]. Although this perspective recognises the cognitive dimension of place quality, it appears to unduly concentrate on the physical elements and in particular the external appearance. Reference to the 'external environment' misses a fundamental point about quality of place, which is about the dynamics of place; how it functions and who uses it. Hence, quality of place is as much about the social, cultural and democratic elements as it is about the physical dimension. It is the vibrant bundle of amenities which comprise quality of place [Arora *et al.* 2000].

Place quality is multidimensional, open and non-static. Indeed, it is 'alive' and so needs to be cast as a fluid and amorphous concept open to change. It is both process and product; forever being made and remade. Recognising that that quality of place is an ensemble concept, one must also be aware that the overall sum is important and not necessarily each of its constituent elements: this would draw caution against identifying the core elements of place quality and then systematically trying to deliver each component as a separate 'output'. Too often the concept has been oversimplified and inappropriately utilised as merely a new policy 'buzz' term. Having conceptualised the role of place quality, the next section examine Sunniside's unique development trajectory.

2. Sunniside: contextual background
and development trajectory

[Sunniside] has played a key role in Sunderland's commercial and cultural life over centuries. This historical area was once the traditional heart of the City. However, while its importance has declined over recent years, the legacy of its *former*

glory is evident in the urban structure and magnificent buildings which survive to the present [*Sunniside Partnership* 2005, p. 4, emphasis added].

Sunniside is a dense urban quarter of mixed uses covering approximately 17 hectares (43 acres), located in the east of Sunderland city centre (see Figure 1 and Fot. 1 on coloured insert, p. 1)[1]. The area contains approximately 600 buildings, 160 of which are 'listed' for their architectural or historic significance. It has a rich and extensive historical trajectory that dates back to Medieval times. A century and a half ago, it was *the place* to be in Sunderland; a thriving area of the town, home to rich merchants who resided in grand townhouses. It was the bourgeois social space of a booming industrial town.

It was the 1815 Jameson masterplan which laid out Sunniside Gardens – shown in the centre of the photograph in Fot. 1 – and the grid-iron terraces that provide the contemporary spatial formation of Sunniside with what has subsequently been represented as a *distinctive edge*. During the 1840s, this residential quarter began to take on more commercial uses and over time business began to dominate its two major arteries: High Street West and Fawcett Street.

The dissecting of Sunniside Gardens to accommodate an expanding highway network during the 1940s paralleled the demolition of terraces in the north and east of Sunniside to make way for the development of factories and industrial units (see Fot. 2). The erosion of Jameson's grid and recommodification of Sunniside was compounded during the 1960s and 1970s, with the development of several car parks and buildings with small-footprints replaced with larger commercial outlets. Economic restructuring emerging in the latter part of the 1980s brought about a decline in office employment, most notably affecting the historic core of Sunniside. A process 'virtually killing-off the small, niche service-type businesses which had sprung-up' according to one research participant. Worryingly for the local policy community the trend was the polar opposite to what Florida would propose as a way of improving a place's competitiveness in the 2000s.

As investor confidence waned during the 1990s, the area's future grew increasingly uncertain. Sunniside was suffering from extreme neglect, economic decline, social malaise and perceived to be a 'space of risk'. The consensus from the local policy community was that the area's image profile had taken a 'battering'. Socially stigmatised and conjuring images of fear, Sunniside became cast as a 'problem area' (see Fot. 3). This is acutely apparent in terms of property vacancy rates during the late-1990s, which were in excess of 30 per cent of all units. Rather alarmingly, this represented a 500 per cent increase in vacancy levels over a ten year period. During this period of Sunniside's development trajectory the residential population was minimal, perhaps less than thirty inhabitants (Sunniside Partnership, 2004), and those which did reside in the area tended

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[1] The city of Sunderland is one of many peripheral 'old industrial' urban areas dispersed across Europe. Languishing outside the list of European centres that would likely score highly on Richard Florida's creativity indices, such as Manchester and Berlin, Sunderland has faced persistent economic and social issues since the decline of its shipyards that commenced in the early twentieth century.

Fot. 2. Sunniside Gardens, 1960s
Source: Sunderland archives.

Fot. 3. Empty lots, disused premises
and urban degradation
Source: Author (Fot. 3 and 4).

to be transient; frequenting the area's hostels and bedsits. This lifeless image – though not necessarily lifeless social space – was compounded by the relocation of a number of artistic organisations and businesses that moved to Tyneside to take advantage of the regeneration of the Ouseburn Valley [Pugalis 2008], as sites across the city and wider sub-region competed for investment in a haphazard manner. Places such as the Ouseburn Valley had attained early-mover advantage as they sought to attract, in line with Florida's thesis, creative talent from *elsewhere*.

The outflow of people, businesses and uses over the final decade of the twentieth century projected an anxious investment climate. The depressing environment of Sunniside during the 1990s, qualifies perceptions of the area as an economically

Fot. 4. The Old Post Office

stagnant and aesthetically disintegrating place. The area had lost its shine as a market downturn cast a dark shadow over Sunniside. It subsequently became economically redundant as its raison d'être evaporated in a dramatic fashion. Nevertheless, in social and cultural terms it was not so obsolete. The number of permanent residents had plummeted but Sunniside still performed an important social meeting ground and a cluster of services for some of the most marginal members of society began to develop. From the dominant perspective of the local policy community, the neighbourhood's rich cultural heritage was fading fast, as its image began to be more commonly associated with 'abandoned lots', 'winos' and 'street people', which combined to strengthen the hegemonic discourse that it had become a problem area. However, 'despite all this gloom there were flickers of optimism' [*Sunniside Partnership* 2004, p. 14]. The general streetscape was low quality in comparison to some of the 'architectural gems' that interview participants fondly identified Sunniside with during the 1990s. It was these remaining 'buildings of character', such as the Old Post Office (see Fot. 4), and its proximity to the city centre that perhaps persuaded urban policymakers, planners and designers that the area was *worth saving*.

Sandwiched between a *space of opportunity* to the west, in terms of the city centre, and a *space of need* to the east, in terms of the deprived communities of Hendon, Sunniside was considered to be 'an *obvious* choice for regeneration' (Conservation officer interviewee, emphasis added). Sunniside was about to be re-imagined as an 'asset store' (see Figure 2 on coloured insert, p. 1), but to recount the words of a prominent local property consultant before the assets could be exploited the area was calling out for 'a bit of pump-priming and a bit of external cash'. Having sketched the background and key features of Sunniside, the analysis now moves on to unpack the way the local policy community and other elite actors formed partnership body, and subsequently represented the project within a place quality discursive framework.

3. Re-imagining Sunniside

The general concept of the Sunniside Area Regeneration Initiative (SARI) was first embraced in public policy in the city's *2000-01 Economic Development Strategy* [*SCC* 2000]. It formalised deliberations between a small group of elite actors that 'saw a lot of listed buildings in [Sunniside] that were either being underused or being used for uses that weren't particularly desirable or simply derelict and vacant. They had little or no funding themselves and there was also a staff resource issue, because it seemed to me that it was mainly planning officers who were interested in trying to move Sunniside forward but they had no funding' (Regeneration manager interviewee). Since the publication of the economic development strategy, the SARI has been refined and re-imagined through a conveyor belt of strategies, frameworks, masterplans, business plans and other mediums [see *e.g. David Lock Associates* 2007;

SCC 2006; *Sunniside Partnership* 2004, 2006; *Urban Cultures* and *David Lock Associates* 2001]. Over the past decade there has been a sustained attempt to re-imagine and reconfigure Sunniside as an inner-city neighbourhood exhibiting an interesting designscape and powerful built heritage. The twenty-first century mission is to revive the area's 'soul' in order to create a safe and accessible destination space – a place conducive and attractive to Florida's creative class.

Sunniside Partnership was established in October 2003 by a myriad of public sector partners to oversee the neighbourhood's urban revitalisation. Underpinned by an ideology of privatism, the partnership was expected to operate as a public entrepreneur; delivering economic growth through the manipulation of property markets, developing social infrastructure and improving environmental conditions [Cochrane 2007]. Put concisely, it was set-up with generous public sector resources to improve the economic competitiveness of Sunniside and also contribute to the resurgence of Sunderland. Performing as an arms-length extended enterprise operating as a 'one-stop-shop', it reported to a partnership board consisting of local elites from across the private-public-community spectrum.

The vision for Sunniside received public sector financial support to deliver a design-led intervention package and marketing strategy. These projects were guided by what could be termed 'Brand Sunniside', which evoked a distinctive spatial vision, although this re-imaging was almost exclusively undertaken by elite actors. Commensurately, alternative spatial imaginarés that were deemed by the broader partnership of dominant interests to be 'ill-fitting' were bluntly scripted as threats and problematised. A number of place quality projects 'to kickstart the regeneration process' (Local planner interviewee), have thus far been implemented:

- The redesign of Sunniside Gardens and place quality improvements to 'priority streets and spaces' (see Fot. 5).
- A property upgrade initiative and commercial property grant scheme.
- Improvement works to Manor Hotel/West Sunniside including the creation of a digital media and arts centre with incubator space branded as the PLACE (see Fot. 6).

In addition, a private sector-led leisure and mixed use scheme known as Limelight has been promoted as a major development 'win'. Space does not permit a detailed examination of each project here, but the research revealed that these place-based projects had each been represented as directly competing in place wars and spatial contests, for finite inputs such as the creative class, urban tourists and knowledge-intensive businesses.

The regeneration of Sunniside was depicted as *a must*. The dominant discourse that championed the place quality-driven policy approach can be termed a 'necessity'. This is exemplified by the following statement by a senior council officer who argued that 'it is the responsibility of the public sector to create the conditions by which regeneration happens and to create the opportunity to work, live and consume in the Sunniside area'. A systematic 'hearts and minds' campaign ensued; initially wining-over some key

officers within the council, followed by local politicians, and then a media campaign was put into action which helped exert pressure on public funding partners, gain popular support and publicise public sector commitment to businesses and investors.

A requirement of Sunniside's revitalisation strategy was to stimulate the re-establishment of a 'community' by reintroducing residential, business, leisure and retail uses back to the area. It was as if the existing social, business and residential community was not existent. Brand Sunniside left no space for these groups – symbolically and materially. Hence, the urban poor and lower-order businesses had been represented as economically and socially non-productive and even damaging. Phrases such as 'blight on the landscape' and an urban 'eyesore' were repeatedly invoked by the key partnership figures to describe unwanted businesses, whereas the urban poor inhabiting Sunniside were often represented as 'troublemakers', 'druggies' or 'vagrants'. It is in this respect that Helen Liggett argues that, '[the properly clothed mannequin is more a citizen in some fluorescent-lighted venues than an improperly clothed human being' [Liggett 2003, p. 107].

The SARI was outwardly projecting a sensitive revitalisation strategy guided by the three pillars of social development at its crux – economic, social and environmental – but Healey claims that even holistic regeneration programmes are generally 'doomed to be subverted into an economic dynamic' [Healey 2007, p. 24]. This was apparent in the case of Sunniside, as key partners catered unabatedly to the whims of market forces and the preferences of prospective investors in particular. One demonstrable example of this is the deployment of place quality 'beautification' projects, such as the Gardens, 'to jumpstart private property redevelopment, in part because improvements in public space have relational benefit to the value of surrounding private property' [Mitchell, Staeheli 2006, p. 150]. In recognition of the public and private property dialectic, public sector investment partners have been keen to enhance the place quality 'offer' of Sunniside only in so far as it will induce private investment and redevelopment activity. It is a prime example of bluntly adopting a narrow conceptualisation of place quality: one skewed to the needs of a particular set of interests. The following section considers the contradictions between social goals and economic logics.

Fot. 5. Redesigned Sunniside Gardens   Fot. 6. The PLACE

Source: Sunniside Partnership – Fot. 5 and Author – Fot. 6.

4. Brand Sunniside:
A vehicle for neighbourhood revitalisation?

Since the projects inception in the early 2000s, the revitalisation of Sunniside has begun to have a noticeable impact, particularly in terms of new functions and uses. This was evident in the reported increases in investor enquiries, new businesses opening, growing residential demand and more cranes in the sky signifying an increase in development activity immediately prior to the Great Recession of the late 2000s. With the UK's Coalition Government implementing some deep public sector budget cuts coupled with the fragile national and global economic outlook, more recently indicators of revitalisation have been more subdued [Pugalis 2011, 2012]. However, one would get an entirely different impression from the partners re-imaging Sunniside.

Sunniside Partnership grasped the 'power of the myth' and 'spaces of illusion' from the outset. Sensing that the 'media war' was crucial they embarked on an effective promotional campaign which represented the project as a resounding success. The partnership have been extremely active in selling Sunniside, not only to potential investors, users and local residents as one may expect, but selling the concept to media organisations. During the early years of Sunniside's revitalisation campaign, ephemeral visions and evocative images almost entirely divorced from concrete realities were mobilised to conceal the limited public sector resources and a depressed local property market. Never expected to be realised, these iconic visions were tactically deployed to 'de-territorialize and re-territorialize desires' [Dovey 2004]. Supported by some selective place quality enhancements to administer as urban business cards, such as the revamping of the Gardens, the partnership has been nominally successful at re-imaging this 'underused', 'unsafe' and 'bleak' space into a 'vibrant', 'safe', 'creative' and 'modern' space to be consumed. It is now a trendy, edge of city urban quarter showing promise and presenting more viable opportunities for gentrification.

Promotional and marketing material (inevitably produced in a glossy format) irrespective of its intended audience tends to always converge in its depiction of Sunniside as a safe, clean and progressive place, steeped in history with a distinctive culture, vibrant atmosphere and prime site for business. Through such a univocal positive image, the elite local policy community have sought to align Sunniside with a middleclass postindustrial rhetoric of consumption and steer away from industrial discourses of inner-city decline. In so doing, whether consciously or subconsciously, the partnership has projected their representations of what Sunniside could become in a manner whereby alternative visions and perceptions appear to be unviable or inappropriate.

To date, image reconstruction has perhaps been just as central in the neighbourhood revitalisation of Sunniside as has physical redevelopment. Making the link with the 'performative' turn of urban policy, Lovering convincingly argues that, "faced with little real power to bring about a major qualitative change in aggregate economic growth... we may expect more emphasis on the symbolic dimension – the less you can really do, the

more you have to shout about it" [Lovering 2007, pp. 359-360]. Visibility rises in stock as is exemplified through the contemporary fascination with marketing, iconic design and image. The symbolic regeneration gestures utilised by Sunniside Partnership appear to correlate with this observation. The main regeneration efforts have all been laden with symbolic values. Take the Gardens for example, considered an 'early win', the underlying objective was to stabilise the economic space of Sunniside, demonstrate public sector commitment and action, and symbolise the rebirth of a forgotten historic core.

Conclusion

There is a heightened awareness of the powerful role of spatiality in the production and organisation of our social lives, accordingly the 'place matters' policy discourse has gathered momentum. Quality of place is a relatively new concept, which is gaining importance and interest at a number of spatial scales and political administration levels. Whilst this paper has reported on empirically grounded research concentrated on a single case, the role of place quality in revitalising urban spaces offers readers' new perspectives on issues that are usually taken for granted.

Whether deserved or not, it is evident that urban spaces acquire reputations as 'places' of particularity. Some will have more positive images whereas other representations of space will be less appealing. Once a place has acquired a negative reputation it is extremely difficult to reverse public perceptions of an area suffering from social stigma. To a large extent, this is the task that most neighbourhood revitalisation initiatives are charged with reversing. Depicting Sunniside as a 'problem area' with the potential to capitalise on under-used 'place assets' has been instrumental in legitimating significant amounts of public sector funds channelled into a market-based place quality approach to regeneration. This involved the coming together of an elite group of policy actors to represent the need to 'save' Sunniside as a necessity; transforming an underused neighbourhood from a space of production to one of consumption. Sunniside's urban makeover – in a material and metaphorical sense – signifies a radical reconstitution of urban form, functions, relations and identity.

Spatially targeted public sector assistance, first expressed in official documentation in 2000, set the wheels in motion for a quality of place focussed revitalisation strategy pinning its hopes on private sector investment. The approach set out to first stabilise deteriorating conditions and then revitalise the area. Sunniside was represented as a once vibrant urban space in need of economic resuscitation. It was in this respect that place quality improvements were utilised to demonstrate some quick 'wins' and concrete change. The economics of urban management dictates that decisions will be heavily weighted by profitability indices or returns on investment. Hence, it was the creative classes from the city centre and beyond that the Sunniside Partnership marketed distinct projects and informed the production of Brand Sunniside. Sunniside has

sought to refashion its identity by images and actions directed by a distinctive vision for a new urban future. In very narrow terms, the partnership and the wider collective of elite interests have been relatively 'successful'. Yet, the vision only paid lip service to the deprived communities residing to the east of Sunniside. The revitalisation of Sunniside can therefore be understood as a purposeful act to reface the eastern edge of the city centre, under the guise of supporting a deprived community. Alternative spatial imaginarés were absent from the official vision. A narrow perspective where costs dominate value considerations threatens place quality, longer-term values and can strip away cultural distinctiveness [Pugalis 2008]. Drawing on the example of Sunniside in the north east of England, the paper has drew attention to the practice of securing limited public resources allocated for area-based social interventions that are publicised as benefiting the many (and specifically deprived communities) but tend to disproportionately benefit a more limited range of (capitalist) interests.

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