

# ‘Right on the end’?: Young people’s sense of belonging and marginalisation in English coastal towns

*Work in progress*

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# Background & introduction

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- Coastal towns in England – once thriving centres of commerce, leisure, tourism, fishing, heavy industry.
- Some of most deprived neighbourhoods are in coastal towns – recently gained prominence in policy/academic debates, often focused on youth and their prospects
- Peripheral by nature, but also cut off economically, socially, culturally, infrastructurally
- Place-based sociology – coastal youth likely to feel marginalised, but relatively little research on sense of place (which impacts on life chances). Debates preoccupied with urban vs rural (Canosa et al, 2018)
- **Purpose of this paper?** *Examine how young people's sense of belonging in coastal towns is shaped by built environment, access to public space, leisure opportunities and sense of place*

# Theoretical context

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## Relational understanding of place and space

Massey (1994) – a relational sense of place, uneven economic development, power geometry. Desmond (2014) – ‘relational ethnography’

## Marginalisation

Wacquant (2014) – ‘territorial stigmatisation’ of place at different scales, and places that are *made peripheral*

## Theories of belonging and attachment

Place habitus (Bourdieu, 1990; Allen & Hollingworth, 2013). Sense of belonging – place as a discursive resource which constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (politics of belonging) (Antonsich, 2010)

## Case study towns

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- **Barrow-in-Furness**
- Larger port town, higher deprivation
- Manufacturing (30% of jobs – four times national average). 1/5 employed by BAE Systems
- Geographically remote, end of peninsula, North West England – ‘longest cul-de-sac in Britain’
- Poor transport connectivity



- **Great Yarmouth (GY area & Lowestoft)**
- Larger seaside town, higher deprivation, East of England
- Major fishing port until 1960s
- Off-shore energy hub – new high skill jobs, yet high levels of deprivation, unemployment, and low levels of skills & qualifications



# Data & methods

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- Sept 2023 → present
- In-depth interviews
- Mapping workshops
- Focus groups
- Creative & participatory activities, inc. photographs and mapping
- In Great Yarmouth area, co-production of data generation with 28 Sociology A-Level students from local 6th form college
  - Mapping activities and Policy Proposal workshop
  - Students conducted in-depth interviews with friends and peers

## Background characteristics of sample – for this paper (n=53)

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Town	Barrow-in-Furness 22	Great Yarmouth (area) 19	Lowestoft 12
Gender	Male 22	Female 29	Trans/non-binary 2
Race/ethnicity	White British 41	BAME 11	No data 1
Social class (self-described)	Working class 32	Middle class 17	Not sure 2
Current qualification focus	GCSE (or equiv.) 21	A level (or equiv.) 21	Degree or apprenticeship 6
Primary occupation	School/college 42	Working full-time 2	Apprenticeship 7

## Initial impressions were *very* negative

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**So, where do young people your age spend their time then?**

They either just go out and sit in town or towards like probably the only park we have got left, like the big park... And even then when there is loads of people in one place there is just loads of problems and everyone just wants to like either fight or kick off and argue with everyone. It's just causing a bad place for everyone else.

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- Jackson, M, 18, Barrow-in-Furness

Few years ago there was loads to do but over the years it's all completely died out... the go-carting place, bowling... trampoline park.

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- Nick, M, 20, Barrow-in-Furness



### Are there any kind of areas maybe you'd avoid?

Yes. So, there is a specific road, which I think a lot of people think about, it's called King Street, yes, and a lot of people just hang around there or like outside of McDonald's and it's just very unnerving.

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- Chloe, F, 18, GY

The only place to go is like McDonalds and that's not the most pleasant anyway.

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- Katie, F, 16, GY

# Youth marginalised within their towns

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- Public spaces seen as off-limits
- Retreat from public space and into family home – to ‘protect [and socially distance] themselves from association with a tarnished place’ (Wacquant, 2014)
- Hanging out in each other’s houses (both towns), eating McDonalds in the car (Barrow)
  - *Caveat: young people’s social habits have changed, including drinking less*
- Opportunities to forge personal/social ties (which also strengthen young people’s sense of belonging – Antonsich, 2020) are limited



‘We keep saying it, but there is just, like, nothing to do... if we were doing something it would like going to our friend’s house, just to like sit and – we’ve been playing Uno lately [laughs]... there’s nothing else. Or like there’s a lot of eighteenth’s lately, so drinking.’

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- Amy, F, 17, Barrow-in-Furness

## Marginalised in relation to elsewhere

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- Concerns over:
  - What their place identity says about them (place habitus) – e.g. **‘I don’t wanna look like I came from Great Yarmouth, do I?’** (Omar, 17, M, GY)
  - Geographical remoteness – **‘Barrow’s, like, the largest cul-de-sac, like, in the country’** (Amy, 17, F, B)
- Cultural and leisure activities available elsewhere – *examples: shopping in Lancaster; pop concerts in Norwich*
- Stigmatising views of outsiders...

I went there for three days, and I dropped out because I hated it. I just didn't like it. I wasn't treated very nice... they were just really stuck up and super like judgy about [me being from GY] and I just didn't really fit in with that... there is like that stigma [about] Norwich people being so much better than Yarmouth people and Norwich being this and Norwich being that...

**Like a kind of snobbery, was it?**

Yes, and I was like okay. I just think it's sad that Yarmouth has that reputation because it never used to be like that.

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- Ana, F, 17, Great Yarmouth

# Marginalised in relation to elsewhere

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- Feelings of shame for a few – most just resigned/ambivalent
- *Caveat – some of this could be to do with life stage and wanting something 'new'*
- Distinctiveness of their towns (and coastal towns more generally) – high levels of homelessness/drug use; tourism; weather; WP
- 'If you want to get to the same places as other people as well, if you want to be in the same situation as someone from a city, you will have to put in that little bit extra just to end up the same' (Sienna, F, 18, Lowestoft)



## Some positives...

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- More positive than we expected – less unremittingly negative than in pilot study towns (Grimsby, Cleethorpes)
- Community
- Access to natural environment, including beach
- Economic benefits of tourism
- Sensory experience/mental health

I love just going for walks along the beach,  
and hearing the sea, and the smell, and  
yes, I just - It's quite mindful

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- Becca, F, 19, Lowestoft

"I feel like the area is nice, I feel like  
people take it for granted having the lakes  
so nearby, the beaches and stuff. A lot of  
people that live in the city will probably  
be jealous of that.."

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- Alfie, M, 18, Barrow-in-Furness

## Defence of place?

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- Negative remarks are occasionally qualified with positive spins or defensiveness
- Also, low expectations that things will get better – so they are resigned to it?
- It's also a bit of shame, I think, in the face of the overwhelmingly negative

Although I don't like this place that much... it's not a great place to be in, [but] there are always worse places to be in... you have just got to find the ways around it...so when I hear people talking [about how bad GY is] I feel like they are just too stuck in their own head about 'oh, this place is bad, this place sucks', but have they really went anywhere else, really?...

I feel like people have too many expectations of their surroundings rather than actually going out and changing their surroundings or actually trying to do something to change themselves in their surroundings ... everyone in class was annoying me because they were making it sound so bad... I was very confused. I was like, it's not that bad.'

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- Omar, F, 17, Great Yarmouth

It's a nice place to be. Instead of a city or something like that, we're exposed to a lot more stuff and it's quite a sheltered place really, so it's not like like stabbings and like... Well, there is a few chavs, but it isn't like people walking around with loads of knives under their balaclavas and that ready to kill you. It's not too bad. I would raise my kid here. It's not too bad. It's an alright place. It's a bit depressing but it's alright.'

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- Nick, M, 20, Barrow-in-Furness

# Conclusions (preliminary)

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- Their sense of belonging – which relies on feeling secure and comfortable (Antonsich, 2010) – is adjusting to new realities (Butler and Muir, 2017, in Habib and Ward, 2021), like the decline of the high street, loss of youth centres/spaces
- Happening inland too, but particularities about being on periphery – and stigma that comes from being coastal?
- Sense of belonging eroded by loss of safe public/youth-oriented spaces
- The negatives are very negative, but we were able to hear about good things associated with growing up in a coastal town – natural environment, sensory experience, community. Sizeable minority ‘defend’ against bad reputations – flickers of hope/pride/attachment? Or hopelessness, low expectations, ambivalence, clutching at straws following years of austerity?
- Caveat – peer-effects of group discussions. Individually, more nuanced