Research with urban youth: exploring representations of Kilburn through action methods

Liza Griffin & Kamna Patel
Development Planning Unit, UCL
Liza.griffin@ucl.ac.uk
Kamna.patel@ucl.ac.uk

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Project Overview

• Aims
  – provide young people with means to evaluate representations of Kilburn with a view to providing participants with a sense that they might also be able to shape their urban environments

• Young people as researchers

• Now, we are analysing what they produced & how & what this says about (i) Kilburn (ii) our approach to working with young people
Methods: building capacity to analyse

- **Interviewing**
  - Participants interviewed a friend or relative to build historic profile of Kilburn from the interviewee’s perspective

- **Transect walk**
  - Small groups conducted local transect & discussed ways to analyse & represent data

- **Image & text analysis**
  - Reviewed representations of Kilburn in newspapers, music, fiction & vlogs
Project outputs & outcomes

• Outputs
  – Exhibition of participant's work illustrating how they, themselves understand Kilburn & how they would like Kilburn to be represented
How we did it

Central to the project and its aim was to help the community of [location] understand and be involved in the development of their area. The City Gallery was instrumental in bringing together residents and local stakeholders to discuss and develop ideas for the area.

There were three main stages to the project: engagement, consultation, and action. Each stage involved different approaches and methods to ensure the project was inclusive and representative of the community.

Engagement

The first stage focused on engaging the community in discussions about their area and its future. This involved setting up a series of workshops and events to gather ideas and opinions from residents.

Consultation

The second stage was consultation, where the project team gathered feedback and suggestions from the community. This was done through focus groups and surveys.

Action

The final stage was action, where the project team implemented the ideas and suggestions gathered during the consultation stage. This involved working with local stakeholders to develop a plan for the area.

The project was a joint effort between the City Gallery, [local organization], and [other organizations]. It was supported by [funding body], which provided financial assistance to ensure the project was successful.

In summary, the project was a community-led initiative that aimed to empower residents and stakeholders to shape the future of their area. Through engagement, consultation, and action, the project achieved its goals and made a positive impact on the community.
“What do you think about the Evening Standard pull out on property in Kilburn?”
“It looks nice. Like a good place to live”
“Why do you say that?”
“I don’t know….people are having fun. Chatting.”
“What else do you notice?”
“The people in the photographs look wealthy”
“How do you know?”
“I don’t know. Their clothes. They are drinking cappuccinos”
“What else?”
“Oh my god... it’s so white! Everyone’s white!”
“Is that your experience of Kilburn?
“Errr. No. That’s not Kilburn. Not at all”
“What strikes you about the advert for the new flats?”
“They look gorgeous. I’d love to live there”
“Why?”
“They look modern. Clean”
“Do you think you will?”
“No. How much are they?”
“£600,000 I think.”
“[laughs]. No”
“Wait... They’ve airbrushed out our school!”
“What?!”
“The view from the flats in the advert. You can’t see St Augustin’s!”
“[They laugh]. We’ve been erased!”
“Why do you think they did that?”
“Maybe they felt it didn’t fit in with the image of the area. I suppose...”
"What strikes you about the advert for the new flats?"

"They look gorgeous. I'd love to live there."

"Why?"

"They look modern. Clean."

"Do you think you will?"

"No. How much are they?"

"£600,000 I think."

"[laughs]. No."

"Wait. They've airbrushed out our school!"

"What?"

"The view from the flats in the advert. You can't see St Augustin's."

"[They laugh]. We've been erased!"

"Why do you think they did that?"

"We don't fit with their image of the area I suppose."

An image is never just an image - it conveys meaning. Places can be given meaning through being represented.

Photographs are no more 'real' than paintings. They too can be carefully composed or edited.

A representation is as an image, likeness or reproduction but they are always partial depictions. They bring some things to light, while hiding others. And they are always produced from a particular standpoint.

An essential part of representation lies in attempting to convince others about the validity of a particular point of view.

Interpreting representations can tell us about the values of those who designed them and the meanings that places & landscapes hold.
Project outputs & outcomes

- Outputs
  - Exhibition of participant's work illustrating how they, themselves understand Kilburn & how they would like Kilburn to be represented

- Outcomes
  - New ways of ‘seeing’ Kilburn
  - Contributions to engendering diverse perspectives on a place
  - did project affect how participants understand their own power to contribute to placemaking?
Dilemmas in Youth Research

• Questions of ‘authentic’ youth voices
  – Parroting acceptable discourses e.g. on virtues of ‘multiculturalism’ & ‘diversity’ in a school environment

• Incentives to participate
  – ‘Fun’ research projects where students explore their ideas of place can look like homework & thus be treated like homework (e.g. assessment-led learning & the production of an exhibition piece)