



Project overview

This PhD research project asked: *What can listening with residents on the UK south coast tell us about urban seaside gentrification and displacement injustices?* The project:

- investigated the under-researched English urban seaside, focusing on 3 neighbourhoods in Brighton, Worthing and St Leonards-on-Sea
- pioneered a listening method that could be carried out during fluctuating covid lockdowns in 2020
- recruited 22 residents for listening walks, listening-at-home activities and follow-up interviews
- brought together gentrification, seaside, displacement, mobilities and sound studies

Overall, it created an innovative listening approach to rethink how residents experience, understand and relate to their changing neighbourhoods.

Findings

Listening

Due to the pandemic disruption, I remotely supported residents to undertake listening walks and activities in their homes. Participants creatively captured their observations and thoughts stimulated by listening in their streets and neighbourhoods, which were then discussed in online/phone interviews. This experiment with sound and mobile methods created a new approach. I call this *listening-with*, which is a form of participatory listening research. It includes a toolbox for how to support listening activities, capture listening, create layered soundmaps and analyse listening-generated material. I found that each resident approached and experienced listening to their neighbourhood's acoustic environment differently. I therefore argue we need to value and embrace diverse listening experiences and positionalities, and in so doing, create inclusive and interactive ways that listening with others can generate new knowledge.

Urban seaside gentrification

Through *listening-with* participants, I identified 25 different listening practices and focused on 5 specific types to analyse gentrification: lockdown, static, mobile, comparative and reflective listening. I found that gentrification can be understood as a sensory experience, which is increasingly permeating everyday lives in these Sussex neighbourhoods. Participants used existing narratives about the seaside and gentrification to make sense of audible processes of change. There are indications of different types of gentrification happening simultaneously (e.g. classic, new-build and transnational gentrification) with variations in pace and localised explanations. But "seasideness" is important in the ways that dominant ideas about the seaside (past, present and future) shape how gentrification is experienced. This includes the mutually supportive relationship between tourism and gentrification.

Displacement injustices

The project also grappled with how we can listen to displacement and open up our understandings of displacement injustices that go beyond a single event of forced movement. Sounds encountered during the listening activities stimulated discussion about displacement encounters throughout participants' life stories. Participants' movements from, to and along the seaside were often part of navigating uneven housing affordability and anticipating displacement. No participant clearly identified as a gentrifier or displacee, yet, through analysis of their listening positionalities, it is possible to hear different ethical positionings. This complicates simplistic ideas of gentrification "monsters" and "victims" that dominate existing discussions. Listening to displacement can therefore reach across past personal encounters, present feelings of culpability and future fears for an increasingly exclusionary coastline.

Why is this important?

- Overall, this project stimulates a different, creative way of learning about, discussing and connecting to an over-rehearsed yet persistent issue of urban injustice.
- Participatory listening research is not a well-established methodology, but this research pioneers an approach that can generate new knowledge about people's experiences and relationships to place.
- The seaside is an under-researched area and this study adds empirical detail of how urban seaside gentrification is layered upon existing histories and waves of gentrification at the coast.
- Theoretically this project pushes understandings of gentrification as a sensory experience, arguing that these processes are evident in, and shaped by, audible processes of change.

Glossary

gentrification: 'the production of space for progressively more affluent users' (Hackworth, 2002: 815) OR 'the poshing up of a place to the detriment of working folk' (Dr X, research participant)

mobilities studies and methods: research that explores everything to do with movement (people, ideas and things) and believes that how, when and where we move and/or stay put is fundamental to finding out things

sound studies and methods: umbrella term covering research into sound and listening, includes sound art, soundscape studies, acoustic design and sonic ethnography

participatory listening research: a way of listening with others to our environment that generates new understandings whilst embracing different listening experiences, practices and positionalities

listening-with: a form of participatory listening research using a toolbox of listening walks, listening activities-at-home, interviews and a creative listening analysis approach

urban seaside gentrification: the specific way gentrification is shaped by "seasideness" and supported by tourism in towns and cities along the English south coast

positionality: differences in social position and power that shape our identities and access in society

listening positionality: how race, class, gender, sexuality, ability and cultural background intersect and influence the way we are able to hear sound, music and the world around us (from Robinson, 2020:10)

displacement: traditionally understood as a single event of forced out-movement of working class residents due to gentrification but recently broadened out to include exclusionary processes of un-homing, alienation, reduction in social networks and amenities and cultural domination

Key References

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Sheller, M. (2020) Mobilities and Displacement. In: Adey, P., Bowstead, J.C., Brickell, K., et al. (eds) *The Handbook of Displacement*. ProQuest Ebook Central: Springer International Publishing AG, 41-54.

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