

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: York St John University		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 14 Geography and Environmental Studies		
Title of case study: Days of the New Town: Developing knowledge, resources and audiences around the New Town expansion era of Warrington (UK) through a novel archive-sharing project.		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: December 2015 to November 2019		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Susan Fitzpatrick	Lecturer	September 2015 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2017 - January 2019		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>The evidence presented below pertains to two impacts from research which seeks to answer the question <i>What is the role of archival resources in enhancing contemporary use of green space amongst residents of the partnership New Town of Warrington, Cheshire, UK</i>. Firstly, the project has changed the curatorial approach undertaken by key cultural gatekeeping organisations in Warrington: Culture Warrington and LiveWire. The second impact is a new focus and interpretive context for understanding a hitherto marginalised aspect of the social history of the town of Warrington, namely the era it expanded to become a Partnership New Town (1969 to 1989), has been provided for audiences through the exhibition and its accompanying digital resources.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>In 2017 and 2018, the third wave of New Towns in Britain were 50 years old. This landmark was acknowledged particularly by researchers and those working within the museum and archive sector, with a call to encourage a deeper public engagement with archives of New Town Development Corporations. This was done to promote a more nuanced public understanding of New Towns as significant and unique contributions to the UK's post-war built environment heritage and their part in developing access to socio-cultural history of the nation's post-war housing. This call was formalised by the establishment of the Association of New Town Archives and Museums (ANTAM) in 2019. PI Susan Fitzpatrick is the academic representative on the board of this national body [3.5; 3.6].</p> <p>Furthermore, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on New Towns was set up in 2018. Upon its launch, the then Minister for Housing cited the original new towns as invaluable sources to learn lessons in planning the proposed next generation of New Towns [3.1; 3.5]</p> <p>Fitzpatrick's curation of the 'Days of the New Town' exhibition aligns with the aforementioned agendas of positioning the social history, architecture, planning and design philosophies of New Towns across the UK and Europe as a significant and relevant part of the housing histories of the 20th and 21st centuries. A further motivating factor for Fitzpatrick's research was to redress the evident gap in local history narratives presented by key cultural gatekeeper organisation</p>		

Culture Warrington, and its partner organisation LiveWire in which the New Town expansion era was not acknowledged as part of the history of the town. When Fitzpatrick first pitched the idea of the 'Days of the New Town' exhibition to curatorial staff at Culture Warrington, they immediately recognised the exhibition was a positive way to acknowledge the New Town expansion story. Fitzpatrick and Warrington Museum and Art Gallery developed an emphasis upon the lived experience of New Town residents in the exhibition's planning phase.

Fitzpatrick first approached the Museum in 2016, so the exhibition could take place in the 2018, the year that marked the 50th anniversary of Warrington as a partnership New Town. The exhibition offers new insight into the New Town expansion era (1969 to 1989) of Warrington, UK. It reveals how "early settler" residents apprehended and experienced the new town and it provides hitherto uncollected reflections from the New Town's architects and planners [3.1]. The 'Days of the New Town' exhibition [3.2; 3.3] displayed a selection of archival photos from the Warrington and Runcorn New Town Development Corporation. In addition to these, Fitzpatrick enlisted resident communities from the New Town expansion areas to donate family photographs to a "People's Archive" for this exhibition. In this sense two archives 'met' and audiences were invited to consider how each archive 'produces' place and memory. Fitzpatrick [3.1] argues that an effect of the commitment to the new towns building program from the 1940's to the 1970's by key actors in government, was that the New Town resident was constructed during this time as an anonymous and compliant subject of the administrative complex created by central government and the development corporations who delivered the New Towns. Interventions in the form of documentary films have, more recently sought to address this by offering a more qualitative and nuanced picture of the social experience of residents. But these accounts are dominated by the new towns of the south of England. There is a recognition for example by those leading ANTAM and the AHRC funded New Town Heritage Network [3.5] that resident's stories in the rest of the UK's new towns remain marginal. In the specific case of Warrington, a 'partnership' New Town (in which New Town expansion occurred around an existing and economically flagging urban area), Fitzpatrick's primary data collection (interviews) reveal how new settlers in the New Town in the 1970's develop a multi-faceted sense of place as they adapted to living in a new place which held no existing familial or other social ties. A further dimension of Fitzpatrick's primary data collection (archival research) uncovers the issues experienced by the existing population as they coped with rapid, large scale spatial expansion of the town. As mentioned, this engaging recent history was marginal to the manner in which Culture Warrington presented Warrington's history. Maxwell [3.4] reflects on the complexity of capturing marginalised histories, peoples and places in 'official' archives. The 'Days of the New Town' project however, is the first to address such concerns in the context of the UK New Town building program, particularly around a New Town outside of the South East of the UK. The collaboration between academic researcher, local residents and curatorial staff which the project undertook has changed Culture Warrington's curatorial approach in a way that gives residents a stronger, more autonomous voice in telling their own cultural history. The 'Days of the New Town' exhibition and the project's blog and social media presence successfully and unambiguously address the existing marginalisation of Warrington's new town expansion era by prioritising this era of the town's history via free, accessible public platforms that have proved hugely popular. Survey data gathered by Fitzpatrick reflects the importance to residents of drawing the New Town expansion areas of Warrington into the social history narratives of the town as a whole, and further, how the 'Days of the New Town' project has successfully initiated this process (see section 4).

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[3.1] Fitzpatrick, S. (2020) *Ways of Knowing the Landscape of the New Town: A Lefebvrian Analysis*, in Learning lessons from the French and British New Towns: Paradise Lost? (Fée, D; Colenutt, B; Coady-Shaevitz, S. eds.) Emerald: Bingley, UK. [Can be supplied by the HEI upon request]

[3.2] Fitzpatrick, S. Days of the New Town: Birchwood at 50 photographic exhibition held at Warrington Museum and Art Gallery between June 16th 2018 to January 12th 2019. [Can be Supplied by the HEI upon Request]

[3.3] Fitzpatrick, S. (2018) The Last Utopia. Essay for the exhibition catalogue of Days of the New Town: Birchwood at 50. Warrington Museum and Art Gallery June 2018 to January 2019 <https://daysofthenewtown.files.wordpress.com/2018/07/the-last-utopia.pdf>

[3.4] Maxwell, S. (2016) Mapping invisible cities: Addressing the complexities of achieving polyphonic archives. Doctoral thesis, Northumbria University. <http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/36136/> accessed November 3rd 2020

[3.5] New Town Heritage Network 2018: <http://www.mkcdc.org.uk/new-towns-heritage/events/french-and-british-new-towns/> accessed 01/04/2020

[3.6] MK Gallery (2019) The Coming Community: New Towns, Art and Place (Conference) Friday 24th May, Milton Keynes, UK. The Coming Community: New Towns, Art & Place (4) Dr Su Fitzpatrick - YouTube accessed February 9th 2021

Evidence of the quality of the research. Originality: The underpinning research is the first to seek to address the marginalisation of New Town expansion as a phase of the social history narratives which are presented by Culture Warrington. Significance of the project is evidenced by the replicable model it instituted at Warrington Museum in curating local history narratives. This has informed the curatorial practice of those working in Culture Warrington.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Impact 1: Change to the curatorial approach of Culture Warrington and Live Wire

PI Dr Susan Fitzpatrick initiated this change in practice by creating an exhibition at Warrington Museum called 'Days of the New Town: Birchwood at 50' **[3.2; 3.3]** which established a novel and replicable method of gathering exhibition content utilising the personal archives of the resident communities of the town. Below is corroborating evidence from three key gatekeeper members of staff within Culture Warrington and Live Wire Warrington who testify that the novel research approach initiated by Days of the new Town raised their awareness and understanding of the New Town expansion era and the research approach is responsible for change in their practice.

Impact of Museum exhibition

The Collections Officer at Culture Warrington, reflecting on the exhibition at Warrington Museum has said "*I think we could do more to cover recent local history [...] it is a good idea to enlist community, residents and the public in curating exhibitions about Warrington's history*". In response to the question of whether the approach taken in collating content for the Days of the New Town exhibition has influenced the way the Culture Warrington now approaches exhibitions on recent local history his response was "*undoubtedly so*" **[5.5]**.

The interpretation manager and producer at Culture Warrington outlines below how impactful Fitzpatrick's method of bringing the Development Corporation archive together with residents' photographs in dialogue has been. He refers both to how her approach enabled a telling of this

hitherto unacknowledged part of the town's history, and how it has impacted the Museum's approach to local history narratives:

"As a relatively new part of Warrington, Birchwood is underrepresented in the Museum's archives, so this was an important part of the exhibition.[...] I think it was a very positive exhibition for Warrington Museum & Art Gallery; as far as I'm aware it's the first time we displayed an exhibition specifically about Birchwood. [...] From my perspective this was an opportunity to try a different approach with a local history display, an approach I feel was vindicated and will inform how we work in the future." [5.3]

Impact on local library user-group communities in Warrington

Culture Warrington is a key gatekeeper organisation and agenda-setter for the town's arts and cultural offer. Culture Warrington's People, Performance and Resource Manager approached Fitzpatrick in May 2019 to invite her to work with the group 'Friends of Padgate Library'. Fitzpatrick was asked to curate a further exhibition at Padgate Library, located in another New Town expansion area of Warrington. This exhibition has been delayed by Covid and will take place in Summer 2021. 'Friends of Padgate Library' asked Fitzpatrick to replicate the curatorial approach of the Warrington exhibition [5.2; 5.4].

The aforementioned People, Performance and Resource Manager at Culture Warrington outlines below how Fitzpatrick's approach to the Days of the New Town exhibition initiated a change in approach by Culture Warrington/ Live Wire as to how they would seek to attract new audiences to local libraries:

"The exhibition would help us to attract new resident born in the 1970-80's (a demographic we struggle to attract into the service at present) to the library, opening up the opportunity to showcase what our library service offers [and to] further explore and document their heritage" [5.4]

Impact 2: Widening access, building knowledge and understanding into a marginalised history

In November 2017 Fitzpatrick created a blog [5.1] showing 217 archival photographs from both the Warrington New Town Development Corporation and images collected from residents of the Birchwood area of Warrington, and providing interpretive written context for these images. By October 2020, the blog has had 2,974 visitors whose views of different pages on the blog has reached 12,568. An online questionnaire was also targeted at the audience of the exhibition and blog [5.6]. As of October 2020, 42 respondents have filled in the entire survey. Results from the questionnaire demonstrate several points clearly: (i) 95% of respondents did not know of any other online resources about the New Town expansion area of Birchwood, Warrington prior to the project's digital resources going live. (ii) 100% of respondents said it was important that Birchwood should be considered part of Warrington's social history. (iii) 80.5% said that looking at the photos increased their awareness of the New Town expansion era in the town. (iv) The project has influenced the reach of Culture Warrington in terms of new audiences: 69% of those who filled in the survey said that they would be more likely to visit Warrington Museum and Art Gallery as a result of visiting the Days of the New Town exhibition. One former resident who donated photographs to the 'People's Archive' testifies in unambiguous terms about the profound impact her involvement in the project had, particularly how it made her "re-think" her past and the sense of place she attached to the New Town expansion area of Birchwood:

“The exhibition has made me rethink my child and teen environment completely. Explaining where I grew up always came with a long explanation that people didn’t quite get. The exhibition gave me a new sense of place and opinion about the space I grew up in.” [5.6]

Culture Warrington/Live Wire and its partners see Fitzpatrick’s curatorial approach as replicable, and highly effective in attracting those who currently have lower engagement with cultural resources on offer in the town. One further voice corroborating the claim that the novel approach of establishing a ‘People’s Archive’ is an effective way for residents to participate in the telling of the New Town expansion story, and thereby increase users of the library, is the Chair of ‘Friends of Padgate Library’:

“The history of the New Town in [this] area has never been captured. The proposed exhibition aims to build on the existing interest, but also develop new audiences. By involving the local community through ‘people’s archive days’ we aim to engage with new users who will come to the library and use the facilities for the first time” [5.2].

The legacy of the research lies in these two impacts, and in the connections forged between residents, Fitzpatrick and curatorial staff who continue working together. There is now a shared confidence in the researcher’s curatorial method, an increased legitimacy for residents’ archives and a stronger experience for existing and new audiences of Warrington Museum and Art Gallery and users of Padgate Library.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of ten references)

[5.1] Blog: Days of the New Town: www.daysofthenewtown.wordpress.com from November 2016, photographs and interview extracts added continuously to this blog

[5.2] Testimonial: Chair of Friends of Padgate Library, Friends of Padgate Library

[5.3] Testimonial: Producer at Warrington Museum and Art Gallery, Culture Warrington

[5.4] Testimonial: People, Performance and Resources Director, Culture Warrington & LiveWire

[5.5] Survey Data: Questionnaire response, Collections Officer at Warrington Museum and Art Gallery, Culture Warrington

[5.6] Survey Data: Questionnaire responses, 42 respondents’ reflections on the blog, Facebook page, and exhibition “Days of the New Town: Birchwood at 50”.