



Fieldwork and Research for Rebranding, Re-Imaging and Positive Change

“We need to conceptualise space as a constructed set of interrelations, as the simultaneous coexistence of social interactions... a proportion of the social interrelations will be wider than and go beyond the area being referred to in any particular context as a place.” *Space, Place and Gender*. Doreen Massey (1994)

This is the second of two Factsheets which explores a range of fieldwork options that can be undertaken as part of the independent investigation for A Level Geography, specifically linked to place. This Factsheet has a focus on fieldwork and research linked to rebranding, re-imaging and regeneration-led change which are often popular choices for NEAs. It also considers the role of social media as a tool to collect research information.

Understanding the Difference: Re-Imaging, Rebranding and Redevelopment

There are strong overlaps between the “R” words of rebranding, regeneration and re-imaging, but there have some important differences which are illustrated in **Figure 1** on **Page 2**.

Knowledge and understanding of these variances might be important, when for example, establishing the focus for a piece of fieldwork linked to urban change and identity. **Table 1** provides summaries of their meaning, plus relevant examples.

Table 1 Deconstructing the “R” words

The “R” Word	Context and Meaning
Redevelopment	This is usually a longer-term process involving development of new infrastructure as well as housing.
Rebranding	This is a set of processes and mechanisms in which a place is redeveloped and marketed so that it gains a new identity. Re-imaging might be either a precursor to, or result of, rebranding.
Re-imaging	This references removal of a bad-place association and / or reputation in relation perhaps to poverty, poor housing, levels of crime, deprivation, neglect, deindustrialisation etc. The association of a positive new image can therefore attempt to attract new investment, tourists and residents to an area.
Regeneration	Can involve all the three above processes.
Renewal	Usually refers to revitalisation of ‘broken’ communities, often with new housing.

In terms of collecting evidence for re-imaging, rebranding and redevelopment, the indicators shown in **Tables 2a** and **2b** provide a useful starting point. They have been initially categorised (**Table 2a**) according to primary or secondary fieldwork opportunities. Many of the suggestions in **Table 2b** could be recorded or observed by using methods such as photography and note-taking.

Table 2a Possible measurements (mostly quantitative) of regeneration: physical, economic and social

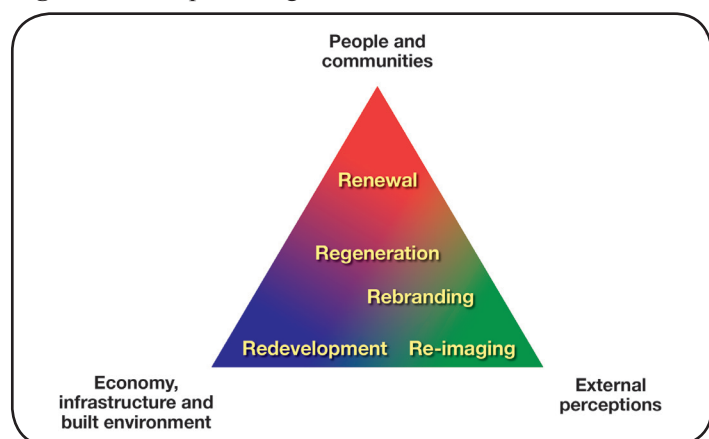
Physical regeneration	Economic regeneration	Social regeneration
Design quality indicators	Income and area spending	Reduction in crime rates
Reduced car use	New employment	Population growth
Re-use of developed land	Willingness to pay for cultural amenities	Greater community cohesion
Reduced vandalism	Employer relocation	Improved leisure and education opportunities
Public transport usage	Increases in land prices	Reduction in health referrals

Key data tends to steer towards: *primary data*, *secondary data* and *combined*.

Table 2b Possible evidence (mostly qualitative) of regeneration: physical, economic and social

Physical regeneration	Economic regeneration	Social regeneration
Design quality indicators	High resident and visitor spends in cultural activity	Positive change in resident’s attitudes towards area
Reduced car use Minimal graffiti	Diverse workforce (skills, gender, social profiles)	Increased participation in local volunteering
Cultural facilities and workspaces	Increased property values and rents	Improved public-private-voluntary sector partnerships
Higher density housing to reduce environmental impacts	Attraction of graduates to areas	Change in a place’s external image (e-survey)
Environmental improvements through public art and architecture	More job creation, especially creative and knowledge economies	Reduction in crime and antisocial behaviour

Figure 1 Conceptualising the “Rs”



Deconstructing Place Through Interpreting Cultural and Artistic Representations

In the previous Factsheet, place representation was examined through photography. This was considered very much through a personal perspective as to how **you**, the observer or recorder, might consider the representation of a place. However, place identity is constructed externally through a range of other media, both printed and online. This could include formal tourist information (brochures, websites, etc.) or more individual representations on social media (TripAdvisor, Facebook, Twitter, blogs and forums). There are a number of practical ways that this external representation of place can be understood and interpreted. **Table 3** provides some starting points, or prompts, from which the initial stages of visual analysis can be undertaken.

Old Postcards & Photographs – Historic Image Analysis

Old photographs including postcards can offer detailed “narratives” compressed into a single image. They may be the only historical archive that is available about a place, its identity, community and people. These resources often pre-date aerial photographs. Images such as old postcards can be used to show multiple layers of meaning and even evoke stories or questions.

Based around a qualitative analysis of **Figure 2**, several interpretations could be based on some generalised questions and subsequent, linked research. It would also be reasonable to compare the image to a similar but more contemporary view (perhaps in the last few years).

Figure 2 Historical postcard print of Manchester St Ann’s Square (c. 1920s)



- 1) What were the mainstream social and cultural trends at the time the image was taken?
- 2) In what way does the image show a “constructed” form of representation?

- 3) What are the iconic place symbols and place identities that exist in the image?
- 4) Who and how are people depicted – identity, gender, race/ethnicity and age profile?
- 5) How does the same view appear today and what the most obvious differences and similarities?

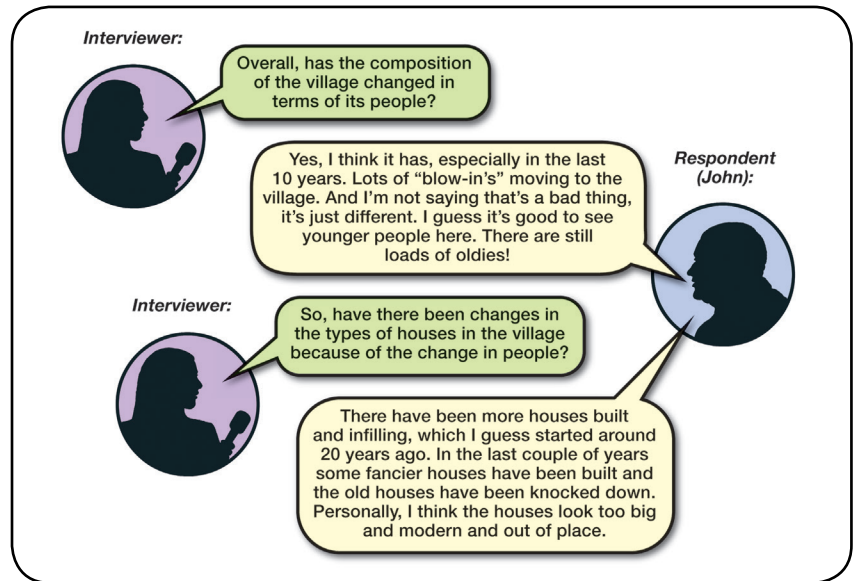
Table 3 Prompts to deconstruct images of cultural and artistic representations

Observe	Reflect	Question
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the form or type of image: painting, print, photograph, drawing? • Who created the image? • What text is on the image? • What dates are on the image? • Is the image black and white or in colour? • Describe who is in the image. • What types of buildings are in the image? • Are there objects in the image? Do you recognise them? What are they used for? • Describe the landscape and physical features in the image. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the date or period of the image? • What place or region does this image show? • Can you identify a geographic theme (region, place, physical system, human environment interaction, etc.) for this image? • Describe the spatial patterns illustrated in this image. These patterns might be in the people, transportation, buildings, or landscape. • What is the most likely purpose (audience) for this image? • How does this image compare to current image on the same topic or place? • What inferences or geographic connections can you make from the image? • What geographic event, issue, process or problem does this image illustrate? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do the clothing, buildings, transportation and/or landscape reflect the economic, political, or societal conditions for the time when the image was created? • What was the likely motivation of the creator of the image? • What is the bias or point of view of this image? • How is this image connected to other documents, maps, recordings, images, or artefacts? • Why is this image significant? • Why would certain people or characteristics of the landscape be missing from this image? • What geographic questions would you like to ask the creator of this image? • Would it be difficult to find? the location of this image? Explain why or why not. • What seems to be missing from the image?

When studying external images and representation, you need to be well organised!

- 1) Every time you gather or analyse your data, keep a detailed log account of the context. Things like the time, date, place, weather, and situation can turn out to be essential to a valid interpretation.
- 2) Keep track of data and label everything carefully, so that you can manipulate and rearrange images without worrying about being able to identify where they came from, their context, etc.
- 3) Laying out and organising your images: you might want to lay them out in different ways, constructing different groupings and orders. The important question to consider is “what groupings make sense in light of my project focus and title?”

Figure 4 An extract from an open dialogue with John, a resident of a village in south-west England



Google Street View offers a window into what the area is like in more recent times. It can be used for a more contemporary look at recent change, especially in urban areas (e.g. the changing nature of the high street), which can be investigated (see **Figures 3a** and **3b**). For many locations, there is an archive of several years that can be used to look at change which is currently happening at an exponential rate.

Figure 3a Google Street View (Shrewsbury) in 2009



Figure 3b Google Street View (Shrewsbury) in 2014



Recording Lived Experience of Place

One of the easiest and most obvious ways of documenting how people see, experience and understand places (especially in relation to change) is to organise a semi-structured conversation with them. In such a discussion, you will try and tease out information about how places have changed, bearing in mind the focus you are trying to achieve. In **Figure 4**, the focus for this interview is to consider the village’s change in the last 30 years. The exchange took place in the local village pub, and the conversation was recorded on a mobile phone before being transcribed. This type of approach has a number of advantages and disadvantages (**Table 4**).

Table 4 Advantages and disadvantages of recording lived experience of place

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It creates an in-depth understanding of the attitudes, behaviours, interactions, events, and social processes that comprise everyday life. • Allows the researchers to understand complex social ideas, not discoverable by other fieldwork methods. • Can often be undertaken with limited cost, equipment and travel. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The scope is fairly limited, so its findings are not always widely applicable to other places or situations. • If not well set up, the researchers can themselves introduce bias during the research as well as during the interpretation of findings. • The researcher may not be able to find the right person / group of people to undertake the research.

Figure 6 An extract of interpretative coding using themes from a single text

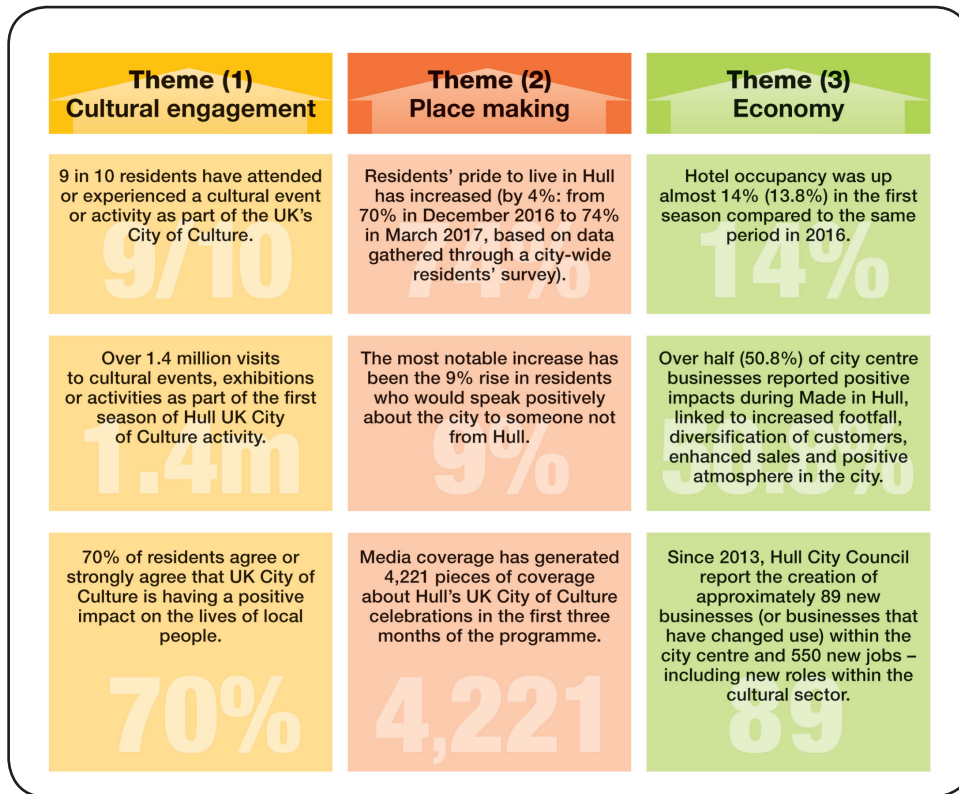
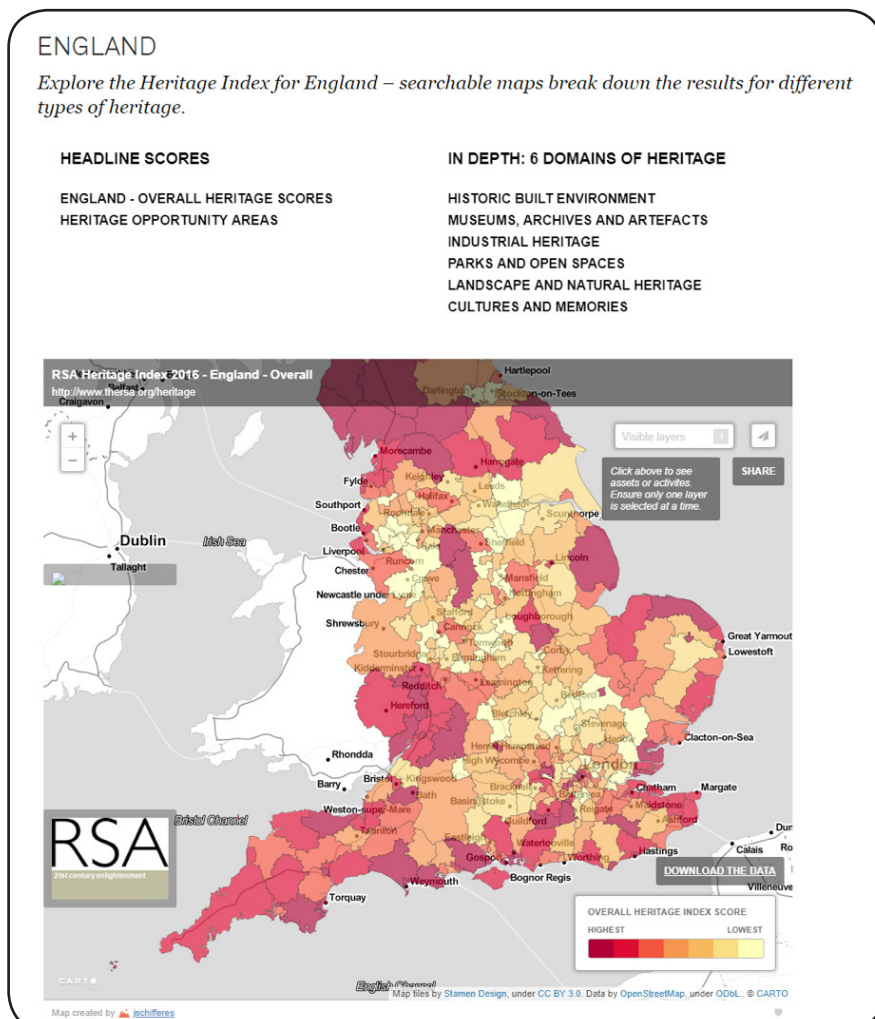


Figure 7 An example of an online GIS heritage index and various “domains”



Alternatively, research could be used to test existing ideas based around some other persons or groups research. For example, **Figure 7** shows an example heritage index for England. This could be analysed and verified as part of a rebranding and local heritage survey. Various agencies, both formal and informal will have different materials that can be utilised. Source: <https://www.thersa.org/action-and-research/rsa-projects/public-services-and-communities-folder/heritage-and-place/England>.

Conclusions

In 2001, the then ODPM (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) stated:

“Regeneration is not simply about bricks and mortar. It’s about the physical, social and economic well-being of an area; it’s about the quality of life in our neighbourhoods. In relation to the physical, this is as much about the quality of public realm as it is about the buildings themselves.”

In many places, physical regeneration has not been about building-based flagships and city-centre public realm schemes, but is instead seen through smaller public

art projects and concern for design quality in the everyday environment. A pathway for your NEA may look at these ideas, both “big” and small” and try to investigate them further through the eyes of different people and players within a local community. A word of advice. Keep it achievable. Spatially small often generates more manageable fieldwork and outcomes. At the same time, don’t make sweeping conclusions from very small amounts of data.

References and Further Reading

<https://geographyfieldwork.com/UrbanRebranding.htm> for information all about the differences between rebranding and regeneration

Hull City of Culture Interim study <https://www.hull.ac.uk/work-with-us/more/media-centre/news/2017/city-of-culture-impact-findings.aspx>

Acknowledgements: This *Geography Factsheet* was researched and written **David Holmes**, who works as a Geography consultant and author, and is a former Geography teacher. David has a particular interest in technology and fieldwork, and can be contacted on: david@david-holmes-geography.co.uk.

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