Revisiting Norbert Elias’s sociology of community: learning from the Leicester re-studies

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Abstract

Since 2001 we have been engaged in a re-study of three linked Leicester projects: *The Employment of Married Women in a Leicester Factory* (1959–1962), *The Adjustment of Young Workers to Work Situations and Adult Roles* (1962–1964) and *The Established and the Outsiders* (1965). The three projects contain a number of striking overlaps, not least Elias’s formulation of communities as figurations through which communal behavioural standards are established, learned and maintained. Whether in the different Zones of Winston Parva, or in the large hosiery factories of Leicester, people learned the self-control of drives and affects ‘according to the pattern and extent of socially given drive and affect regulation’ of that time and that community. In this paper we outline the background to the three re-studies and link them to Elias’s work on community and the broader canon of community studies. We then consider methodological lessons learnt from our re-studies – in particular, the practical process of re-studies, the definitional problems of what constitutes a re-study, and the value of visual images and walking the field. We conclude by reflecting upon the analytical promise of community re-studies.

Keywords: Norbert Elias, Leicester re-studies, young workers, gender and work, community re-studies

Introduction

The concept of community has been central to many key works in the sociological literature of the last sixty or more years (see Frankenberg, 1957, 1966; Stacey, 1960; Willmott and Young, 1960; Rosser and Harris, 1965; Pahl, 1984; Crow, 2002). Its centrality often turns upon the fact that ‘community’ can be an all-encompassing concept covering many aspects of social life within particular settings, places or times. It can also encapsulate a diverse range of other concepts including housing, locality, urbanization, citizenship, family, work, employment, relationships and so forth. Community can be operationalized as a cross-sectional snapshot, recording and reflecting upon communities as they are now, or it can be viewed more longitudinally with communities being
considered as a social phenomenon emerging and changing over time. As such, Elias’s (1974: ix) assertion that ‘the figurations of people which are investigated today under the name “community” vary a great deal’ still holds true for contemporary studies of community. This complex and multifaceted nature of research on community has been an emerging concern in our own series of restudies over the last ten years.

Since 2001 we have been engaged in a re-study of three interlinked research projects undertaken originally by former colleagues in the Leicester sociology department of the 1950s and 1960s – The Employment of Married Women in a Leicester Factory (1959–1962), Adjustment of Young Workers to Work Situations and Adult Roles (1962–1964), and The Established and the Outsiders (1965). These re-studies are at various stages of completion and despite their differing origins (two are large scale, publicly funded, empirical studies, the other a reworking of an MA thesis), there are a number of striking overlaps, not least being undergirded to various degrees by Elias’s formulation of communities as figurations through which communal behavioural standards are established, learned and maintained. Elias’s approach to community builds directly on the central thesis he outlined in The Civilising Process (2000). As Mennell elaborates, Elias considers two levels of civilizing process: the individual level where individuals learn the adult standards of behaviour and feelings of their society and, second, the social relational level or how these behavioural standards have emerged and changed through long-term processes over generations and time (Mennell, 1990: 207; see also Goodwin and O’Connor, 2006). Elias conceptualized this as the interrelationship between sociogenesis (the processes of development and transformation in social relations) and psychogenesis (the processes of development and transformation in the psychology, personality or habitus that accompany such social changes) (Van Krieken, 1998). The notion of community is used by Elias to exemplify this and his adoption of *Homines aperti* (see below) ‘as a guiding image of humans and the societies they form: of open, pluralities of bonded and interdependent individuals’ (Goodwin and Hughes, 2011: 681). Communities are central to these long-term social processes, pointing to the interdependencies that bind people to each other (Elias, 1974: xviii), and are a relational, or more precisely figurational, nexus through which behavioural standards emerge, are transformed and are learnt. In the context of the re-studies outlined below, whether it is in the different Zones of Winston Parva, or in the large hosiery factories of Leicester, people learned the self-control of drives and affects ‘according to the pattern and extent of socially given drive and affect regulation’ of that time and that community (Elias, 1980: 202).

At the time of these studies between the late 1950s and mid-1960s, the adjustment to adulthood centred on leaving school and entering paid employment and it was through working that adult behavioural standards were learnt (see Goodwin, 2007). Yet over the course of the last forty years the communities we have been studying have been witness to a massive transformation in how people make the transition to work, the roles of women in
work, and a massive decline in the traditional industries once so dominant in this locality. The move away from the fixed, linear education to work trajectories of the 1960s, the increased transitions into precarious employment, underemployment or mass unemployment have all meant that the processes through which young people acquire the behavioural standards of adulthood have become less certain and more complex. This, along with the accompanying de-industrialization of these communities, may represent something of a ‘decivilizing process’ (see, for example, Mennell, 1990; Van Krieken, 1999, 2011; De Swann, 2003) and a breakdown ‘in the stability and consistency of on-going social relations’ (Van Krieken, 1999: 297).

Through our re-studies we have data from two points in time, within the same community settings, that afford us unique insight into the change and transformation experienced in, and by, these communities as well as what Laub and Sampson (2003: 302) refer to as examining the ‘within-individual variability over nearly the entire life course’ (see Goodwin and O’Connor, 2007a, 2007b). Through our reworking of these projects we have generated particular insight into the practicalities, methodological problems and empirical and theoretical promise that community re-studies can offer contemporary social science. As such this paper has three broad aims. First, we offer a brief introduction to each of the three re-studies before linking them to Elias’s sociology of community. It is not our intention here to offer a full exposition of Elias’s theoretical model of community but more to establish the basis of the three Leicester projects in the community studies canon. Second, we outline the main lessons we have learned from our experiences of undertaking re-studies including the practical process of re-studies, the definitional problems surrounding the concept of re-studies and the role of archival research. We also draw upon our use of visual methods as an important methodological tool in our approach. We explore the use of photo-elicitation, photo-documentation and the value of ‘walking the field’ as a starting point for understanding more about the studies we are revisiting. Finally, we conclude by returning to Elias’s work on community and reflecting on the promise that community re-studies offer in relation to countering what Elias (1987) termed the retreat of sociologists into the present.

The Leicester studies: gender, youth, work and community in Leicester

The Employment of Married Women in a Leicester Hosiery Factory (1959–1962)

In 1959 the Department of Sociology at the University of Leicester was awarded a total grant of £2,025 by the Department for Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) Human Science Committee to undertake research into the employment of married women in a Leicester hosiery factory, ‘having regard
to the problems posed both for industrial management and family life’ (Neustadt and Brown, 1959: 1). The location for the research was N. Corah (St Margaret) Ltd – the largest single hosiery factory in Leicester, employing some 3,500 women in the late 1950s. The research team from Leicester were Ilya Neustadt as project director and Richard Brown as Senior Research Officer, and from the London School of Economics (LSE), Professor Richard Titmuss as co-investigator and Miss J. T. Henderson as a part-time research assistant who undertook the interviews in the field. The LSE connection was vital as the Leicester married women project was a replication of a project led by Pearl Jephcott, overseen by Titmuss, on women workers at the Peek Frean biscuit factory in Bermondsey – published later as the seminal *Married Women Working* (Jephcott et al., 1962). It was through the support of Titmuss and his colleague Nancy Seear that Leicester received the funding from DSIR for the study (Titmuss, 1958: DSIR, 1958), with Titmuss arguing that the study of women working for Corah in Leicester would offer useful comparative data to the Bermondsey study and establish Leicester as a centre for high quality, empirically informed, sociological research (Titmuss, 1958).

Using a combination of interviews with around 10 per cent of the women working at the Corah factory, observations, case studies and a detailed analysis of factory records, the aims of the research were to explore: (i) the extent and nature of absenteeism and labour turnover and stability; variations in earnings and outputs between different categories of employees; (ii) the characteristics of family and household organization of women who go out to work; relationship of these to employment in the factory; attitudes to work, including attitudes to supervision; (iii) compare a small number of households where the wife goes out to work with a similar number of households where the wife stays at home; (iv) the problems for managers and supervisors which arise from the employment of large numbers of married women; and finally (v) the context both of the general local situation with regard to the employment of married women, and of the result of other empirical studies in this field.

From the archival material it is clear that during 1959 a considerable amount of the fieldwork was completed. For example, Neustadt (1959) reports that 500 questionnaires had been completed by women working at the Corah factory, pilot interviews had been completed and the interview sample identified, preliminary and formal interviews had been held with management and supervisory staff and analysis of company records relating to absenteeism and turnover was ongoing. In 1959 Neustadt applied, again with the support of Titmuss, to extend the grant until April 1962 and requested a further £3,961 to fund the analysis of the data collected to date, provide support for further observations and interviews and to undertake intensive studies of family and household organization. Brown *et al.* (1964: 26) report that a further 40 interviews were undertaken with supervisors about their attitudes to and experiences of the employment of married women. However, despite the extension to the project funding, and the considerable time spent collecting data, the Brown *et al.*
(1964) paper was the only tangible outcome from this project, with the remainder of the research being ‘lost’ within this history of sociology at Leicester.

**Adjustment of Young Workers to Work Situations and Adult Roles (1962–1964)**

Towards the end of 1961, and shortly before the funding ended for the Married Women Project, Elias and Neustadt, along with others in the Leicester sociology department applied again to the DSIR for funding for a second project, the *Adjustment of Young Workers to Work Situations and Adult Roles*. DSIR funding provided an initial grant of £15,000 for this research to be carried out between 1963 and 1965 to allow the team to explore the problems young people encounter during their adjustment to their work situations and their entry into adult worlds. For Elias, the transition from school to work constituted a ‘shock’ experience and he argued that young people would experience real difficulties in adjusting to their new role as adults and workers. Unlike the other school to work projects of the time (see, for example, Carter, 1962), Elias argued strongly that he wanted the Young Worker Project to move away from the essentially ‘adult centred’ research of others to focus on the problems ‘. . . which confront, and which are experienced by the young generation itself’ (Elias, 1962: 1).

Fieldwork began in 1962, comprising an interview-based survey exploring the transitional experience for nearly 900 young adults in Leicester. The survey instrument covered all aspects of the young people’s lives including home, work, family, leisure and incorporating an employment event history diary. The sample was drawn from young adults from the Youth Employment Office index of all Leicester school leavers from the summer and Christmas of 1960 and the summer and Christmas of 1962. By 1964, 882 interviews in addition to a pilot survey of 28 interviews had been completed. Yet despite the completion of the fieldwork the high aspirations for the Young Worker Project were never to be realized. In the October of 1962, Elias was appointed to a Chair in Sociology at the University of Ghana and, although Elias attempted to direct the project remotely, it became characterized by acrimony, distrust and lack of direction (see Goodwin and O’Connor, 2006). In 1964, the research team resigned from the project and other members of staff from the Leicester sociology department distanced themselves from the research. As with the Married Women Project that preceded it, very little was to materialize from this research and, with the exceptions of Keil *et al.* (1963), Ashton (1973, 1974) and Ashton and Field (1976), the bulk of the data remained unanalysed for over 40 years and were simply left in an attic storeroom.

**The Established and the Outsiders (1965)**

Published in 1965, and based upon data from the 1950s and early 1960s, *The Established and the Outsiders* is the only one of the original Leicester studies,
in our trilogy of re-studies, which was ever published. Based on an MA thesis originally written by John Scotson, and supervised by Elias, the book is an examination of a ‘figuration’ formed by two working-class groups in ‘Winston Parva’ – the pseudonym for a suburb of the city of Leicester in the English Midlands (Goodwin et al., 2011). Winston Parva is separated physically to the north and the east from other communities by railway lines. It is a ‘small community with a relatively old settlement [Zone 1] at its core and two more recent settlements [Zones 2 & 3] which have formed around it’ (Elias and Scotson, 1965: ix).

The study began when the original researchers’ attention was drawn to the consistently higher delinquency rates in one of the newer settlements (Zone 3 or ‘The Estate’) of Winston Parva. However, their interests quickly moved away from delinquency per se to the ‘differences in the character of the neighbourhoods and to their relationship with each other’ (Elias and Scotson, 1965: ix). Through observations of, and interviews with, local residents, Elias and Scotson discovered that one of the working-class groups was clearly dominant (the ‘established’ in Zone 2 or ‘The Village’), and the other group was subordinate (the ‘outsiders’ in Zone 3), despite being identical in terms of the conventional indices of social stratification such as wealth, income, occupations, education, status/prestige’ (Goodwin et al., 2011: 1). The superiority of the working-class group in Zone 2 was accepted by both groups ‘solely with regard to differences between residents in terms of how long they had lived within the neighbourhood and how “established” they were within the community’ (2011: 1). For example, the young people in these two working-class areas had radically different transitional experiences and experiences of early adult life. As we have seen in Elias’s writing for the Adjustment of Young Workers research (see Goodwin and O’Connor, 2006), the transition from education to work is central to young people learning the self-control of drives and affects ‘according to the pattern and extent of socially given drive and affect regulation’ (Elias, 1980: 202) or learning socially established adult behavioural standards. The more complex a society, the more complex the transition (Goodwin and O’Connor, 2006). In The Established and the Outsiders, Elias and Scotson argued that young people in The Village grew up within established communal standards that were uniform and were shared by many families. This made it harder for the young people to ‘slip up’ and The Village was better able to provide the steady adult control of children which facilitated the growth of stable self-controls (Elias and Scotson, 1965: 106). Accordingly, these young people made the transition from education to work more easily, encountering fewer problems in becoming adults.

By contrast, on The Estate, it was left to individual families to provide standards of conduct, but these behavioural standards and customs differed between families and lacked community reinforcement. Elias and Scotson (1965) report that The Estate ‘kids’ lacked socially stable role models and were not exposed to the same amount of community control to help control socially unacceptable impulses, making it much harder to grow up on the estate. In short,
local community membership had a positive impact on the experiences of one group of young people but a negative impact on the experiences of the other.

Communities intertwined: themes and threads in the Leicester studies

The three studies have a number of key features in common. At the most basic level all three studies were undertaken within the same location and had overlapping sample groups and respondents. For example, many of the women who worked for Corah’s would have lived in the community covered by the *The Established and the Outsiders*. The young people from Winston Parva shared many similar characteristics with the young people in the Young Worker project and, finally, a number of the young women in the young worker project worked for Corah. Likewise, the focus for three projects was ostensibly on Leicester working-class communities at one point in time as all of the fieldwork for the three studies was undertaken between the mid-1950s and mid-1960s. This was a period marked by high levels of employment within Leicester dominated by hosiery, boot and shoe manufacturing and allied engineering industries and the relative affluence of the city and, as documented in *The Established and the Outsiders*, attracted workers from elsewhere in the UK and beyond. Yet beyond these basic similarities, while these studies are, on the surface, about ‘youth’, ‘married women’ or ‘the transformation of an old settlement’ they are also all variants of a community study (or even three parts of the same study of community). Although Elias’s understanding of community is developed in *The Established and the Outsiders*, it is perhaps most clearly, and succinctly, articulated in his foreword to Bell and Newby’s (1974) *The Sociology of Community*. Here Elias critiques the short-term, abstracted and narrowly focused expositions of community, arguing instead that a full understanding of community was possible only via the adoption of process-theories that do not abstract from the long-term diachronic dimension of social change. For Elias, focusing on the polarities emerging from the ‘middle range theories’ such as traditional versus modern, urban versus rural, agricultural versus industrial does not allow ‘for the understanding and explanation of the continuous process, of the development in the course of which one society transformed itself into another . . . they develop from one stage to another without any absolute break’ (Elias, 1974: x). In order to adopt this approach, Elias (1974: xvii) posed two questions:

i. What are the specific interdependencies between people who form with each other that kind of figuration which we call community as distinct from those between people forming other types of figurations?

ii. How and why do these characteristic community bonds change when the structure of the wider society changes?

As such, Elias (2001) also allows us to view communities not as ‘static’ objects but instead as ‘processes’ highlighting relationships past, present and (possible) future and which refer to changing balances of power and changing
interdependencies. Of particular importance here is Elias’s critique of the *homo clausus* or ‘closed personality’ perspective that has come to dominate sociology and which leads sociologists continually to view the individual as something existing outside of society and society as existing beyond individuals (Elias, 2000: 472). The central thrust of Elias’s work, as we have suggested above, is underpinned not by *homo clausus* but by *homo aperti* – a sociological analysis that emphasizes the interdependence of people and traces ‘changes in personality structure hand in hand with changes in the structure of human relations in societies as parts of an overall process’ (Mennell, 1992: 193). In Elias’s (2001) analysis he argues that ‘I’ is an outcome of interactions and relationships with others.

... there can be no ‘I’ without ‘he’, ‘she’, ‘we’, ‘you’ or ‘they’. It is plainly misleading to use such concepts as ‘I’ or ego independently of their position with the web of relationships to which the rest of the pronouns refer. Taken together, the personal pronouns are in fact an elementary form of expression of the fact that every person is fundamentally related to other people, and that every human individual is fundamentally a social being. (Elias, 2001: 124)

In this sense ‘I’ is not a singular but is instead a plurality with ‘I’ and ‘we’ being inextricably linked (also see Smart, 2007). This has clear implications for how we understand the notion of community. Community is not then a collection of individuals but historically and spatially located relationships or figurations that underpin into the group identities and behavioural standards of that point in time. Re-studying community illuminates these changing relationships, interactions, configurations, power balances and webs of relationship.

The three Leicester studies all address these questions in different, but complementary, ways. For example, the Young Worker Project was not only a study of young workers in Leicester, as the study did not simply focus on work and employment in isolation of all the other aspects of the young respondents’ lives. Instead the young worker project became a multifaceted and complex project covering a range of factors that reveals community identity emerging from the configuration or web of relationships to which the young worker belongs. Put simply, the project focused on how the young people became adults via their interactions with the ‘community of adults’ in the workplace (see Goodwin, 2007). Likewise, The Married Women’s Project was not simply a snapshot of the working conditions of married women working full-time in a Leicester hosiery factory, but instead a study which sought to understand the circumstances which had emerged over time that led one community of women workers to work in a particular way. The study is then not about women workers *per se* but the circumstances and ‘traditions’ emerging historically that led to the Leicester factories employing much higher numbers of women in full-time roles as compared to the Bermondsey study (Titmuss, 1958). The community basis for *The Established and the Outsiders* is more
obvious, but again this project overlaps with the other two in that it also tells us much about ‘youth’ and ‘mothers’ in this locality as the two other projects. The bases for all of the studies have echoes of Bell and Newby’s (1971: 19) sentiment that community studies must ‘examine the interrelationships of social institutions in a locality’, which the three Leicester projects clearly do. In this sense, the Leicester studies have more in common with more classic considerations of community (such as Townsend, 1957; Frankenberg, 1957; Stacey, 1960; Willmott and Young, 1960; Rosser and Harris, 1965; Pahl, 1984) given the sheer breadth, depth and range of issues they cover.

Lessons from the re-studies

As outlined above, we now have considerable practical experience of re-studies and the methodological implications of such an approach and this has enabled us to reflect on the lessons we have learnt in the process. In the following discussion we illustrate how, in methodological terms, re-studies may represent a more challenging and multi-faceted approach to research than may be apparent at first glance. We cover issues around the following areas: data reuse, community re-studies, replications, qualitative longitudinal research and visual sociology.

Revisiting community: the problem of methodological definitions

One of the lessons we have learnt has been associated with the need for clarity or the desire to be able to define the methodological approach used when carrying out a re-study. A review of the extant literature around this issue reveals that while a number of researchers in the social sciences are revisiting data from earlier studies, and carrying out re-studies, replication and qualitative longitudinal research, there is not always agreement on how to define such research (O’Connor and Goodwin, 2010). What is also often lacking in accounts of data reuse is any sense of how the ‘revisiting’ researchers approached the dataset itself and carried out the re-study. As Gillies and Edwards (2005: 30) suggest, secondary analysis of qualitative datasets remains an unusual approach and, as a consequence, there is a ‘shortage of empirical models exploring methods and practices’.

Although there does seem to be some reluctance to reuse qualitative data, perhaps due to the lack of examples of this type of work, sociological interest in the reanalysis of existing qualitative data has increased over the last decade. This interest is based, in part, on the establishment and growth of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded Qualidata Archive at the University of Essex. The existence of the data archive provides researchers with access to a diverse range of existing qualitative datasets including some of the classic sociological studies of the post-war period (Goodwin and O’Connor, 2009; O’Connor and Goodwin, 2010). This access, and the burgeon-
ing interest in the possibilities and opportunities offered by such data, has resulted in well-documented debate around the methodological issues raised by qualitative data reuse. Nevertheless, it is apparent that existing qualitative data remain an under-utilized resource. It has been argued that this is because there is a lack of agreement in the social sciences regarding the extent to which qualitative data can be reused by those who were not involved in generating the data in question.

The importance of contextual data

Much of the debate around the subject of data reuse is, therefore, concerned with the importance of contextual data and the need for the revisiting researchers to have access to background information on the original project alongside the original data (Heaton, 2004; Savage, 2005, 2007; Moore, 2007). In many ways we were extremely fortunate with the Young Worker Project because the wealth of surviving information enabled us to reconstruct the ‘story’ of the project in a way that has not been possible with the other Leicester studies. Not only had the original data been retained largely intact in the form of detailed paper-based transcripts for each individual, we also had access to a wide range of background documentation relating to the project. This was, in part, due to the meticulous personal archive created by Norbert Elias and deposited, after his death, in a library archive in Marbach, Germany. Other individuals, for example researchers who had worked on the original project, had also retained paperwork such as letters, meeting minutes and draft reports. By collating this surviving documentation we were able to construct a comprehensive picture of the life cycle of the original project. Further to this, we met and interviewed those members of the original research team who were prepared to reflect on their experience and understanding of how the project developed and ultimately failed. Most valuable of all was the data set itself. Each interview schedule included detailed data on individual experiences not only of the transition from school to work but also recognized the interconnectedness of community, education, employment and family life.

Without doubt the extent of the surviving background material and data relating to the Young Worker Project was exceptional in its coverage. This made it possible to carry out much more than a traditional re-study and goes well beyond the opportunity open to most secondary researchers. For example, first, we were able to begin by carrying out an analysis of the primary data that had not previously been used; in effect a simple data reuse project that has much in common with work done by others using data stored at the UK Data Archive (see Savage, 2005, 2007). Second, like Savage (2005) we were able to carry out an analysis of the interviewer notes collected at the time, giving us a valuable insight into the concerns of the fieldwork researchers and into the logistics of the project. The field notes represented an incredibly rich data source but not all archived projects include documentation of this type and there are wide variations between projects in terms of the extent of
surviving paperwork. Third, we were able to trace and reinterview a sample of the original respondents, creating a longitudinal dataset from a one-off cross-sectional piece of research. Fourth, the original study was a community study and place was an important element of the research design. The majority of the respondents who were successfully traced continued to live in the same locality and, as such, the data we have collected give us a clear sense of changes in community over time.

**Ethical issues**

The Young Worker Project is unique in that it encompassed so many aspects of secondary data use. In retrospect it is no surprise that when we came to write a methodological account of our approach it proved almost impossible to classify and define the methodological underpinning for the work. The multifaceted and multilayered nature of the data meant that guidelines and protocols for how to treat the data did not always exist and we had to define what we were doing as we progressed (Goodwin and O’Connor, 2009; O’Connor and Goodwin, 2010). A good example of this relates to the ethical issues raised by the revisiting of such data. Unusually, we had access to personal profile data of each individual which made him/her identifiable. This information included name and date of birth and details such as school attended, last known address, early employers and so on. Such data would not, of course, usually be available to those making use of archival data yet given that we had these data we made the decision to make use of them in order to trace individuals and construct a longitudinal study from what was, originally, a cross-sectional study. We have written at length about the ethical issues raised by this (see Goodwin and O’Connor, 2009; O’Connor and Goodwin, 2010) and how we dealt with these but given the lack of existing research protocol combined with an unparalleled opportunity to create a rich qualitative, longitudinal data set we devised an ethical procedure appropriate to the data. This, we argue, ensured that our approach made the most of the data but importantly ensured that what we did met current ethical guidelines and was validated by the ESRC in our original application for funding. Subsequently we discovered the work of Laub and Sampson (2003) who faced a similar dilemma in tracing respondents from an earlier study and followed a similar ethical procedure to our own.

**Dealing with ‘missing data’**

The importance of contextual data to the secondary analyst has been widely debated in the methodological literature. It is argued, for example, that for the secondary analysis of qualitative data to produce meaningful insight then the researchers require access to contextual information around the original project. This is both a laudable aim and a valid concern and we would argue that having access to this wide range of background material enhanced our
understanding of the original project immensely. Nevertheless, while the aim is commendable, for the majority of researchers it will not be possible to access even scant documentation relating to pre-existing datasets as, so often, it simply no longer exists or has not been archived. A brief look through data available through the UK Data Archive catalogue suggests that datasets vary enormously in terms of the surviving project documentation. Access to contextual data is, then, often extremely limited and the aim of including this in any analysis is a ‘utopian vision’ rather than a reality for most researchers. Indeed, surely it is preferable for data, where they exist, to be reused rather than ignored simply due to the lack of contextual data available?

We would not argue with the notion that contextual data are valuable and, where they exist can add to our understanding of the evolution of a project. A lack of such data can present the secondary analyst with methodological challenges but, as researchers wishing to revisit historical studies, we can only work with the documentation available. In many cases the only available resources may be the published output from the original project. The Winston Parva project is a case in point. This project is the only one of the three Leicester projects which led to the publication of a book yet this study has very little in the way of surviving background information to draw upon. Our approach has, therefore, been somewhat easier to define methodologically as it is essentially a community re-study that does not involve any form of data reuse. Indeed this distinction between re-studies and data reuse has been used as a way of defining re-studies, with Gillies and Edwards (2005: 5) suggesting that re-studies ‘stop short of re-analysing the original data’. This is a useful distinction to make as it does help to define the differences between a re-study as opposed to, say, qualitative longitudinal research. Yet we would also argue that the reason re-studies do not tend to include a data reuse aspect is because it is rare for the original data to survive, therefore impossible for researchers to revisit the data.

Re-studies of past community studies are not unusual in the social sciences. The Banbury studies (Stacey, 1960 and Stacey et al., 1975) are a good example of this and more recently Charles et al.’s (2008) re-study of Rosser and Harris’s (1965) study of Swansea has continued this tradition. There are a number of similarities between the planned Winston Parva re-study and the Swansea re-study. However, unlike Charles et al. (2008) and unlike the case of the Young Worker Project, we did not have access to the original researchers as both individuals involved (Elias and Scotson) died some time ago. Neither do we have access to any background material relating to the fieldwork of the project apart from brief mentions to the research in letters relating to other matters. Indeed, what we do know is that the published book on the project was based heavily on the MA dissertation written by Scotson; however, this original work no longer exists in either the University of Leicester library where it is catalogued, or the Elias archive where it is also listed. This leaves us with little to go on apart from the single published volume. Yet the strength of
community studies as a basis for carrying out a re-study is that invariably ‘place’ continues to exist and, as such, the key primary resource remains wholly accessible to researchers.

Alongside the revisiting of place we plan to re-examine the debates relating to young people in the community and to ascertain any continuities or changes in the roles and experiences of young people over time. It is not possible for us to trace and re-interview original participants from the 1958 study as we do not have access to any of the information that would make this possible. It is, however, feasible for us to replicate, to a certain extent, the approach of the original study through a contemporary sociological lens.

The value of visual sociology and walking the field

Our first methodological decision, then, was a simple one: to go and ‘walk the field’ and revisit the location of the original research, taking photographs as documentary evidence of change over time. Both methodological approaches, walking the field and taking photographs, are increasingly recognized as valid visual approaches to sociological research (Pink, 2006; Pink et al., 2010; Rose, 2007). The act of simply ‘walking the field’ is less well explored than methods relating to visual images but, as Pink et al. (2010: 5) suggest, ‘the question of the relationship between walking, images and the environment is a rich area for analysis and begs further exploration’. The decision to go and visit the locality was a logical first step in our approach.

While background material was lacking, we had access to a number of photographs of the area taken some 40 years ago when Elias revisited the area. The existence of the original photographs guided our original walk of the field as we deliberately set out to locate and re-photograph the sites where the earlier photographs were taken. Walking the field in this way and taking new photographs enabled us to begin to get a visual sense of how community may have changed over time. As Suchar (2004: 162) suggests, the use of photographs in documenting the changing urban landscape reveals social, political, economic and cultural patterns and characteristics that mark changing cities. The patterns thus revealed can be linked to structural realities and macro-processes that help establish a more textured understanding of urban social transformation.

By combining these photographs with maps of the area we have been able to pinpoint locations, identified as ‘zones’ in The Established and the Outsiders, and to begin the process of revisiting and ‘testing’ the arguments put forward in the original study. From this exercise we have begun to identify that areas classified by Elias and Scotson (1965) as particular zones of the community, based on social class distinctions, may not have been as clear-cut as suggested. This is evident from the photographs included here (see Figure 1) that show Zone 1, identified by Elias and Scotson as a middle-class residential area, but
which consisted only of a very small group of ‘semi-detached houses with garages’ (1965: 29). The photographs alone would not have revealed this information. It was only by walking and familiarizing ourselves with the neighbourhood that we began to realize that the reality of the urban landscape of Winston Parva is not as depicted in the published account. Thus, the experience of walking the field, combined with both access to photographs of the community at the time of the original study and the published work, has enabled us to question the previously accepted version of community based on the Elias and Scotson research.

Figure 1 Zone 1 Winston Parva – 1975 and 2010
Our starting point for revisiting the Married Women’s Survey was also to ‘walk the field’ and record photographic images relating to the project, much as we did for the Winston Parva project. The urban landscape of the city has changed immeasurably since the time of the original study with many factories associated with the traditional industries having been either demolished or converted to a different use, often residential. We visited and documented, by taking photographs of now obsolete factories, the deindustrialization of the city landscape. This chimes with the work of Strangleman (2008: 1498) who has highlighted the importance of such ‘visual representations of deindustrialization, which, while not setting out to, represent labour by capturing the remains of the physical infrastructure tell us something about work practice’.

The building which housed the Corah factory still exists and parts of the building are being used by small companies who rent work units in the space. From a site visit it is possible to see the size of the site and to begin to understand the earlier scale of operations at this factory. It was only by walking the field that as researchers we gained an insight into the sheer size and complexity of the Corah Works and began to understand more about the way that work was organized at the factory (see Figure 2). Re-interviews with past employees have not yet commenced but we plan to use our photographs of the defunct factory site as a means of facilitating interviews and ‘unlocking memories untapped for decades, helping to explain the “why” and the “how” of work as well as the meaning’ (Strangleman, 2008: 1500).

As an important local employer much has been written about Corah’s, including a history of the organization, so it proved straightforward to gain an insight into the profile of the employer. We also have first-hand accounts of working lives at Corah’s from the Young Worker re-interviews.

![Photograph taken by authors on a walking tour of Corah in 2011.](image)

**Figure 2** *N. Corah Hosiery Factory 2011*
The Corah plant, like the vast majority of Leicester’s traditional factories, closed down fully in the 1990s. The loss of these traditional industries has had a major impact on employment rates in the city and Leicester now has an employment rate for women that is lower than the national average (Beatty et al., 2010). Most opportunities for women in the local labour market are focused on the public sector rather than the service sector, which is the more traditional female employer. However, large food production factories have now been established on the outskirts of the city, providing the opportunity to explore the experiences of women working in local industries now and this will be the focus of our contemporary replication of the married women’s survey.

The last of our visual approaches to these restudies was what is perhaps the most well-used visual method, photo-elicitation (Harper, 2002; Rose, 2007). As part of our interview design when revisiting the young workers we asked each participant for a photograph of themselves from around the time of the first interview. Although not all were able to provide this, many produced photographs that were richer than we ever expected, for example, photographs of themselves on their first day at work, photographs of themselves at work or in work uniforms and images of other significant life events. We requested photographs from the time of the interview in the hope that photo-elicitation techniques would help respondents to recall details that may otherwise have been forgotten or lain dormant in the interview. Figure 3 represents a typical photograph from this group. It shows the respondent in his leisure time enjoying the freedom that earning his own money had brought him. Without doubt, the use of the photographs such as this enriched the interview and prompted respondents to reflect back on recalled events and emotions from that period. As Harper (2002: 22–3) posits, ‘photo-elicitation mines deeper shafts into a different part of human consciousness than do words-alone interviews’. This, combined with the aide-memoire of the interview transcript, gave our respondents a glimpse ‘back in time’ and generated rich data that may otherwise have remained buried and long forgotten in the depths of individual memories.

The importance of archival research

The background and contextual information relating directly to the Married Women’s Project is, again, limited. We are not aware of any surviving data and, as the only output from the project was a single journal article (Brown et al., 1964), we cannot rely on published material either. However, the value of archival data in this case is immeasurable. While data archives such as Qualidata do include valuable and rich resources which can encompass contextual information as well as data, other archives can also hold information relevant to past projects. In the case of the projects associated with Elias there is a clear advantage to be gained from having access to his personal archive in Germany. Much of the detailed contextual information was gleaned from visits to that archive and, within correspondence concerned with other matters, we learnt a great deal about other projects from the same time period. We also visited the
National Archive at Kew where many of the records relating to the DSIR are held and from here we obtained copies of letters written and received during the funding application stage including the original research proposal. In the case of the Married Women’s Project the data archive at the LSE has been invaluable as Titmuss’s papers are held there and from this archive we located numerous sources of information on the background to the Leicester project and its links to the earlier Bermondsey study. Indeed, archive research tells us that the justification for the Leicester project was that the Bermondsey project had focused on part-time married women workers while the aim of the Leicester study was to provide a comparative study that examined the experience of women employed full-time in the textile industry. Further archival research revealed that one of the authors of the Bermondsey study (Nancy Seear) was a member of the committee that later approved and funded the Leicester study in recognition of the growing importance of carrying out comparative studies.

We were fortunate to locate in our archival research a copy of the original research instrument used in both the Bermondsey and the Leicester studies. Access to the original instrument will enable us to replicate the original studies using the same questions. In addition, the book about the Bermondsey study (Jephcott et al., 1962) includes a detailed account of the methodological

Figure 3 Respondent C470 ‘On my motorbike’
approach employed and much of the data is reproduced in a series of tables from which the questions used can also be derived. Again, this is an important lesson to be learnt from revisiting studies. Where archival data do not exist and where original data are no longer available, related publications often include very detailed accounts of the methodology which can be used as a basis for the design of a re-study.

Conclusion

We have learnt a great deal about the value of revisiting and making use of existing datasets and have aimed to share some of these lessons here. In the current climate, where ESRC-funded research teams are required not only to deposit their own data in the data archive but also to ensure that data addressing new research questions do not already exist (Moore, 2007), data reuse and re-studies are likely to increase in importance and these methodological debates will continue to evolve. An example of this is the use of visual methods in data reuse projects. We have made use of visual approaches in all three of the re-studies outlined here and would argue that such an approach adds a great deal to our understanding of the history of the individuals, the workplaces and the communities we are studying. Revisiting the past through techniques such as photo-elicitation and photo-documentation alongside the act of walking the field and viewing these communities through the lens of the present has enriched our understanding of the past.

However, the value of community re-studies offers something more than simple data reuse. First, they return us to the analytical promise highlighted in Elias’s own writings on community. The Young Worker Project and the Married Women Project in particular in our work, although they contained clear elements of this process and a desire to examine the diachronic change, could simply have been viewed as one-off cross-sectional studies of youth, gender and work within an East Midlands city. Yet by returning to them, years later, and re-examining the data, the ideas and debates emerging from those projects and re-interviewing respondents some 40–50 years on, we are actually setting these studies within a process/developmental analytical framework that Elias consistently argued for. If we are to fully understand the continuities and changes within these localities and changes in experiences of these groups of workers, we can do this only by considering what the figurations were like in the 1950s and 1960s, what they are like now and how changes have taken place in the intervening years. These community groups have inevitably changed given the economic turmoil of the last 50 years and the impacts that such changes have had on these communities have been dramatic. However, we have also found evidence that aspects of experience and community membership have persisted over that time and that the ‘then’ and ‘now’ groupings are not as different as one might expect (Goodwin and O’Connor, 2007a) – findings made possible only by adopting the stance advocated by Elias and
incorporating his broader conceptualization of community. Second, community restudies have a clear place in addressing what Elias (1987) described as the ‘retreat of the sociologists into the present’. Elias strongly critiqued the ‘narrowing’ of the sociologist’s attention on immediate problems with a view to solving short-term issues at the expense of understanding their genesis over time. A useful recent example of this has been the rush of sociologists to comment upon and quickly explain the UK riots and public disorder that occurred in the summer of 2011. Yet, as Elias suggests, ‘the immediate present into which sociologists are retreating... constitutes just one momentary phase within the vast stream of humanity’s development, which, coming from the past, debouches into the present and thrusts ahead possible futures’ (Elias, 1987: 223–4). If we are to truly understand such behaviours, be it rioters in London, the changing experiences of women and work, how the transition to adulthood has been transformed over the last 40 years, or the long-term deindustrialization of the UK then, we would argue, community restudies may hold the key. By examining and re-examining communities over time we can explore both the continuities and changes in social relations as dynamic processes rather than as static events. Community re-studies allow us to watch the ‘film’ of social change frame by frame, rather than as a one-off ‘polaroid’ snapshot.

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