Mapping the relational construction of people and places

Michael Donnelly[1]*, Sol Gamsu[2], Sam Whewall[3]

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[1] University of Bath,
*corresponding author: Michael Donnelly, m.p.donnelly@bath.ac.uk
[2] Durham University
[3] University of Bath

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A new method is proposed here aimed at eliciting the mechanisms which maintain the relational positioning of people and places within social space. This 'mapping tool' is inherently relational by design and involves participants creating visual representations of their geographic imaginaries, encompassing their perceptions and preferences of different localities. This is followed by an interviewing approach wherein participants 'speak to' their map, producing 'thick' narratives detailing the ties that bind people and places. The method was developed and used as part of a 3-year study into the geographic imaginaries of young people in the UK, involving the collection of 1,000 maps, together with over 200 interviews, across 20 diverse localities. We draw on empirical examples of using the method from this study, including processes of differentiation within the middle classes and the place-based identities of towns, cities and localities.

Introduction: relationality in social science research

The key contribution of this paper is to advance methodological understandings about how the relational construction of people and places can be elicited through a new mapping tool. The mapping tool was developed from a three-year study into the geographic im/mobilities of higher education students in the UK, and we draw on empirical examples from this research in making the case for how this method elicits the process by which the identities of people and places are relationally constructed.

Social science research may not always explicitly refer to relationality, but the notion is nearly always there, at least implicitly whenever an attempt is made to describe or discern social groups. For example, research focussed on the identities, experiences and encounters of 'working class' higher education students in the UK is implicitly drawing boundaries in creating the 'working class' category (Archer, Hollingworth, & Halsall, 2007; Reay, Crozier, & Clayton, 2010; Ward, 2014). Indeed, a hallmark of sociological inquiry has been its long-standing concern with drawing comparisons across social boundaries. For example, Bourdieu's (2013) theoretical framework is comparative in nature in its attempts to distinguish tastes, dispositions, and the embodiment of culture more generally. His idea of social space explains the relational position occupied by actors according to multiple dimensions that encompass social, cultural, economic, symbolic elements, which can be categorised as 'capitals'. In articulating the position and positioning of actors, Bourdieu's framework is inherently relational – it is a social space constructed by a complex web of relations, where the distance and proximity between individuals determine their relative positioning. Whilst social space attempted to explain the social structuring of entire societies in general, his concept of field characterises a microcosm of particular domains within a society (e.g. the arts, politics, law), and defines the relative positioning of actors (according to their stores of social, cultural and economic capitals).

In building a framework for understanding the network of positions and ties that maintain social positions, Bourdieu is also theorising about how boundaries and borders are formed in social life. This same kind of relational approach has been a dominant feature of sociological inquiry, especially in the development of categorisations of social class and class-based differentiations. Savage et al. (2015) have most recently attempted an ambitious categorisation of social class, discerning eight class categories, which are formulated on the basis of economic, cultural and social distinctions. Other studies focussed on particular class fractions, describing the experiences of 'working class' and 'middle class' groups, for example, are implicitly drawing boundaries and constructing categories.

There also exists a long history of research into the identification and demarcation of borders and boundaries internally within class categories, especially differentiation within the middle classes (Ball, 2003; Bernstein, 1975; Power, Edwards, & Wigfall, 2003; Vincent & Ball, 2007). Bernstein (1975) distinguished between the 'old' and the 'new' middle class, differentiating between families that prioritise *positional* over *personalised* modes of conduct. Power et al.'s (2003) work on differentiation within the middle class distinguished within the middle class according to the stocks of cultural or economic capital held by families. Again, the aim of drawing boundaries is evident here in this attempt to distinguish within categories in an even more nuanced and microscopic way. Bourdieu's perspective on social class formation, together with other theorisations of class, are based around relational points of comparison within the broader field. The various possible positions within social structure are interdependent and co-dependent on one another; that is to say, in order to make sense of an individual or group's location, it is necessary to comprehend the location of others and the nature of the ties which bind them together within the field.

The analysis of place within geography has also taken a strongly relational turn over the last two decades. This has been a major trend since the early 1990s, with Massey's work playing a key role in developing this relational understanding of place and space:

> 'what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of relations, articulated together at a particular locus. […] Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings.'

> (Massey, 1993: 66)

Using the London neighbourhood of Kilburn as an example, Massey explained how the identity of a place that appears, or is often thought of, as a fixed entity, place-based specificities are formed through multiple inter-relations of different cultural, economic, social and political processes occurring over time. Massey continued to develop this approach in her later work, describing how place forms 'where the successions of meetings, the accumulation of weavings and encounters build up a history' (Massey, 2005: 139). This more theoretical work provided the basis for further methodological discussion of relational approaches in geography and urban geography in particular.

Over the last two decades social scientists working on comparative analyses of cities have placed strong emphasis on relational epistemological and methodological approaches. Several review articles have outlined the use of Massey and others' more theoretical work to examine these approaches (Ward, 2010; McFarlane and Robinson, 2012; Jacobs, 2012) and Jacobs (2012) has argued for a relational approach to comparative urban research. Ward draws on a range of examples of comparative urban analysis from the early 2000s onwards to show how research has developed methodologies that incorporate relational theorisations of space. One such example is Hart's (2002) analysis of globalization and how international flows of capital have shaped two towns in post-Apartheid South Africa. Her analysis is underpinned by a relational methodological and theoretical approach:

> 'Instead of taking as given pre-existing objects, events, places, and identities, I start with the question of how they are formed in relation to one another and to a larger whole. In this conception, particularities or specificities arise through *interrelations* between objects, events, places, and identities; and it is through clarifying how these relations are produced and changed in practice that close study of a particular part can illuminate the whole.'

> (Hart, 2002: 14)

The whole in this case is globalization and how it plays out in the contrasting settings of post-Apartheid South Africa. Her approach here echoes Tilly's (1984: 82-83) model of 'encompassing comparison' in which different sites are situated in relation to how the system works at a more macro scale. We adopt a similar approach here in our development of a 'mapping tool', in our case used to understand the spatial and institutional hierarchies present in the spatial transitions of young people from home and school to university across the UK. Our selection of schools and colleges and our mapping method seeks to provide, both literally and figuratively 'a mental map of the whole system' (Tilly, 1984: 125) of socio-spatial hierarchies in which students' decisions about where to study are embedded. The method put forward here has important affordances for exposing the latent mechanisms which hold together people and places, in terms of the positions they occupy within social space more broadly. Before going on to describe the methodological tool and its development, we give a brief account of existing methodological literature on researching the relational construction of people and places.

Researching the relational construction of people and places

There now exists a large body of work within social and cultural geography that has relied on qualitative participatory mapping techniques to elicit knowledge about people's sense of place, belonging and place-based identity formation (Brennan-Horley, 2010; Futch & Fine, 2014; Gieseking, 2013; Gould & White, 2012; Halseth & Doddridge, 2000; Lynch & Banerjee, 1977; Trell & Van Hoven, 2010). This body of work, using participatory mapping techniques alongside other conventional qualitative methods (including interviews, focus groups, photography and walkabouts), has allowed for more subjective perceptions of space and place. In Young and Barrett's (2001) research, participants are presented with a blank map of their city, devoid of the artificial structures of a conventional map, in order for them to express and represent their social and spatial perceptions in their own terms. This included their highly subjective use of space and sense of place, indicative of the social and spatial distances and proximities they perceive exist between them and others. More recent work has asked participants to (re)present their spatial imaginaries using digital technologies. Travlou et al. (2008) asked their participants to express their preferences for particular geographic spaces through placing dots on a map of their immediate locality. This produced digital maps of the spatial preferences of different social groups within this area, eliciting valuable knowledge. Similarly, Literat (2013) invited participants to colour-code spaces on digital maps based on where they felt uncomfortable and those where they felt safe and welcome. More often than not, this body of work has relied on participatory methods that narrowly focus on participants' local area, eliciting knowledge about the immediate vicinity. Whilst it is often the case that socio-spatial divisions exists even within small geographic areas, especially in large cities, a focus on small scale geographies can also conceal the ways in which identities of people and places are relationally constituted within broader scale geographies.

If identities of people are places are constructed relationally, through hierarchical power relations, and difference, then this needs to be considered and incorporated into methodologies for generating knowledge about their social formation. This means eliciting knowledge about the underlying hierarchies of power as part of data collection, the ways in which actors position themselves, and are positioned by, the broader social space. This has methodological implications, and points to the need for a 'relational methodology', which we key consider here might have key characteristics. First, a method that accounts for, and is designed to elicit, relationality needs to go beyond generating knowledge of individual groups and places in an isolated way – for example, single site case studies of places, or research with a single class fraction. Second, a relational methodology needs to integrate the broader social space within which actors and places are situated. Finally, the method should provide a means of eliciting the ties and mechanisms which

maintain the relational positioning of social actors and places within social space. It is these ties which maintain the position and positioning of people and places, which could take a number of shapes and forms. But it is only through generating knowledge about the broader social space that these ties are exposed. Desmond (2014) has presented a convincing case for adopting such kinds of relational approaches in carrying out research.

> Relational ethnography takes as its scientific object neither a bounded group defined by members' shared social attributes nor a location delimited by the boundaries of a particular neighbourhood or the walls of an organization but rather processes involving configurations of relations among different actors or institutions.
>
> Desmond (2014), p. 547

He is referring in particular here to ethnographic sociological enquiry of places and groups, including, for example, entities such as workplaces, schools, gay men, single mothers. etc. Desmond (2014) acknowledges the long history of relational thinking in social science research, stemming as far back as the Chicago school's work on urban ethnography, and the Manchester school in anthropology. He reviews four ways of conducting relational ethnography, which include: 'studying fields rather than places', 'boundaries rather than bounded groups', 'processes rather than processed people', and finally 'cultural conflict rather than group culture' (p. 548). Whilst specifically talking about ethnographic enquiry, Desmond (2014) reminds us why relationality should be an integral feature of any social scientific study of people and places. This represents a significant methodological challenge, in terms of developing methods that elicit the broader social space as well as the processes by which the positioning of actors is maintained. A key affordance of the method presented here is its ability to reveal these broader, macro-level mechanisms, such as hierarchies of economic power, that can be important in maintaining the positioning of people and places.

The 'mapping tool'

The wider project where this method was developed is more broadly aimed at bringing an explicitly geographic perspective to contemporary debates around higher education and intergenerational social mobility. The research involved tracing the geographic movements of young people for university quantitatively, before seeking to understand qualitatively what lay beneath such patterning, in terms of cultural, social and economic factors at play shaping their geographic im/mobilities. The quantitative research identified 'regional structures of feeling' in the patterning of geographic (non-)movements for university (Authors), social and ethnic disparities in distance travelled (Authors), as well as a patterning of mobility according to the ethnic composition of origin and destination locations (Authors). Whilst this quantitative work provided valuable information about mobility according to measurable units of analysis (such as geographic distance, places, regions), it failed to bring to the surface more latent understandings about the cultural and social significance of places. The qualitative arm of the research programme sought to address this gap in knowledge.

The qualitative research aimed to collect rich data on the meanings and significance attributed to different places and spatial locations within the UK. This required capturing young people's socio-spatial imaginaries, broadly defined here in terms of how they perceived the geography of the UK, as well as the social and ethnic make-up of different places, especially their origin and destination locations. In doing so, we also sought to gather their understandings about geographic places they sought to move to, where they would feel comfortable, and conversely places they did not desire, and where they would feel uncomfortable. Akin to the ethnographic research tradition, we wanted

to capture *their* socio-spatial imaginaries, in terms of how they constructed and perceived the geographic make-up of the UK.

The mapping tool was purposefully designed to elicit these deep-rooted and latent socio-spatial imaginaries. It was used in an integrated way within the interview process, and our approach to interviewing was entirely based around the maps they created. Prior to the interview taking place, participants were presented with a map of the UK and asked to colour-code it according to the following key: green = 'places where you would prefer to live for university'; red: 'places where you definitely do not see yourself living for university'; orange: 'places where you would not mind or are indifferent about living for university'; blue: 'places you do not know or haven't really thought about.'. The map is a blank map of the UK, omitting place names and county/national borders, so that participants' geographical perceptions were not framed for them as far as possible; rather, they were permitted to *show* the researcher their subjective geographies (see figure 1, the mapping tool completed by a participant). Additionally, the participant made additional annotations highlighting places of importance to them. This included, for instance, where they have family or friends, where they have been on holiday, or where they have attended university open days. For the purpose of the specific research study where the tool was used and developed, a UK map was chosen because we wanted to capture the internal micro-level geographies, between towns, cities, regions and UK 'home' nations. A global or European map would have shifted the focus slightly from these internal geographies. That said, a minority of our participants did talk about the prospect of international higher education, and the unstructured interview approach allowed this to come out. Whilst a UK map was appropriate for this specific study, there is no reason why global maps could not be used to address questions that have are broader in geographic scale, such as the relational construction of European identities.

When used across multiple fieldwork locations, spanning different geographic locations, the mapping tool has the potential to account for how socio-spatial imaginaries can vary according to different geographic vantage points. In this sense, the tool is intended to be used in a comparative and relational way, comparing social groups across different locations, and capturing a broad understanding of the different locations occupied across social space. In devising and applying the tool, we acknowledge the possible criticism that asking participants to display their geographic preferences in this way could be seen by some as a 'classed' activity in itself. However, alongside the map, we collected important information relating to social background, and so were able to use this to interpret and identify any class-based differences in the way young people engaged with the map. In being sensitive to social class when interpreting the maps, this in itself provides valuable insight into the classed nature of the exercise and any class-based differences that emerge.

We deployed this mapping tool across 20 different geographic localities, accessing participants through their schools and colleges, which afforded the time and space for the young people to complete the maps and be interviewed. In most of the schools and colleges, the entire cohort of year 12 (aged 16/17) students took part and completed the maps. Year 12 is the time when young people in the UK are encouraged to begin thinking about post-school destinations, and is therefore a key time to observe them (UK university students must apply in January of year 13, with an earlier deadline of October for Oxbridge/Medicine-related subjects). Over 1,000 maps were collected across the diverse geographic localities, a vivid and richly detailed data-set on the geographic imaginaries of contemporary youth.

Based on their completed maps, we then selected between 10-15 participants in each of the schools within the different localities who were of particular interest, and carried out semi-structured interviews in order to make sense of their socio-spatial imaginaries as represented in the map. The sample of interview participants aimed to include the range of spatial preferences that exist across

and between different fieldwork locations (for example, those who expressed desires for particular localities, and the 'typical' and 'unusual' cases from each of the fieldwork sites). Semi-structured interviews with our participants always opened with the researcher posing the question 'tell me about your map'; followed by prompts aimed at encouraging the participant to guide the researcher through the data they have created. We would often ask the participant to tell us about the green, red, orange or blue spaces they had coloured (without defining them from the 'map-makers'' perspective too much). Pseudonyms are used throughout this paper to conceal the names of people, places and schools involved in our research. However, the names of the broad regions and locations is provided, in line with our research aim to examine the role of place and the subjective vantage points our participants speak from.

The use of this mapping tool to capture relationality is open to the possible criticism that it relies upon a pre-defined 'absolute' understanding of space. Whilst recognising this point, it is important to emphasise that the mapping tool is not intended as a 'stand-alone' instrument of data collection and analysis. It is how the mapping tool is used within the confines of a multi-sited and qualitative study which determines whether or not it can elicit these relational processes. The tool is intended to orient thinking and discussion around the geographic identities of people and places within the interview, and so can only be seen in parallel with the interview process. Beginning our interviews with the question "tell me about your map" generated narratives containing a wealth of information about the ways in which our participants perceived the relational processes that held the identities of groups and places together. It is also important to mention that their discussions often clarified their relational understandings of people and places in ways that occasionally contradicted how these were (re)presented on their maps. This underlines the importance of asking participants to narrate their maps and not wholly relying on the maps as 'stand-alone' data. The remaining sections of this paper draw on empirical examples from our wider study to illustrate the ways in which our maps and interviewing approach elicited a relational construction of people and places.

What binds people and places? Exposing the relationality of identity formation

A key tenet of research approaches that elicit relationality, according to Desmond (2014), stems from being able to account for fields rather than places, in terms of the broader social space wherein subjectivities are constructed and positioned. Following this vein, we show here how relationality is incorporated into our mapping tool and interview approach through its attempt to generate knowledge about the broader social space in which actors and places occupy, as opposed to the study of any bounded groups or places. In doing so, it also goes some way to capturing 'processes rather than processed people' which Desmond (2014) also speaks of, in terms of understanding the qualitative nature of the mechanisms themselves.

A series of examples from the wider data-set are drawn on here to illustrate the affordances of our method for exposing the process of identity formation from a relational perspective, drawing here on identities connected to social class, regions and cities.

Middle class identities

The spatially nuanced nature of social class identity has been well documented, showing how the particularities of place can be an important mediator of class (Connolly & Healy, 2004; Ward, 2018). Following the vein of Bourdieu's relational perspective on class formation, the method provided a means for participants to voice their sense of how actors in different social and geographic locations are positioned relationally. The method prompted participants to foreground spatial elements when discussing their own class-based identities and the perceived 'other'. By prompting participants to

think about broader geographic locations, other than their own immediate vicinity, it gave us a glimpse into their understanding of the broader social space wherein actors class-based identities are perceived to be positioned. In doing so, the mapping method elicited important insights into the spatially contingent configuration of social class formation. It exposed class-based differentiation both *between* and *within* class categories, for example, differentiation within the middle classes (Power et al. 2003).

The way in which our mapping method brought to the surface our participants' understandings of the ties holding class-based identities in place within social space is illustrated here through Dan's account[4]. Dan attended Brasenose School, an independent school in the Greater Manchester area of northern England. His father's occupation positioned him in the highest category of the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC), but he was the first in his family to progress to university and attended the school on a full bursary (he did not live with his dad). This underlines the difficulty of only relying on NS-SEC in understanding a person's social position. Indeed, Dan's narrative did not reflect the 'ease' that has often characterised middle class educational trajectories (Reay, Davies, David, & Ball, 2001). Dan had only used the colour red on his completed map (figure 1); indicating where he would definitely not like to live for university. It is difficult to interpret the spaces left blank on Dan's map, and this underlines the importance of the interview where Dan is asked to narrate his map. In indicating his perceptions and preferences of different geographic locations, the map also worked to bring to the surface Dan's understandings of social class identity, largely of his peers, and how this was relationally constructed within social space.

> I prefer it up north, [I] just feel closer to home, if I do need to go home, I can, and people sound like me a bit, they have got some of the same views, and I can get on with them more, kind of the same, bit of banter, compared to people from Devon or Cornwall say... umm but yeah there is-
> **What do you mean they sound like you? You mean your accent?**
> Yeah almost, like we went down to-, sometimes schools would come up from London and I don't have the-, even here I don't have the best accent. I can make it more middle class when speaking to a teacher, [when] I am asking for something and help, or explaining my point of view, because I am more middle class, but especially when the schools from down south come up you can see the difference in the accent-
> **What can you see, what do you mean?**
> Just- even the posher more middle classed people from around here, just see them, [it is] like they have just come from the mines, even the one's that their parents are doctors and stuff- when speaking to people rally refined, their southern accents just sound like really northern, you don't hear it normally because you are so used to hearing it, but you can pick it up subtly, but then again when people from Liverpool come over then we mock them for their [accent] so it's fine, we are not the bottom of the pile.
>
> *Dan, white British, no family experience of HE, Brasenose School (independent school, Greater Manchester)*

This account was generated from our discussion of Dan's map (figure 1), and was prompted by the interviewer asking Dan questions about the places he had coloured in red. The interview prompting was intended to gain an understanding of Dan's perceptions of places, accessing the way he imagined social and geographic spaces across the UK. In doing so, the map was valuable in eliciting a more comprehensive account (geographically and socially) of social space as understood by Dan.

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[4] Pseudonyms for the people, places and schools involved in the research are used throughout this paper. However, the names of the broad regions and locations is provided (e.g. Greater Manchester) in line with our research aim to examine the role of place and the subjective vantage points our participants speak from.

Figure 1: Dan's map (Brasenose School, Greater Manchester, England).
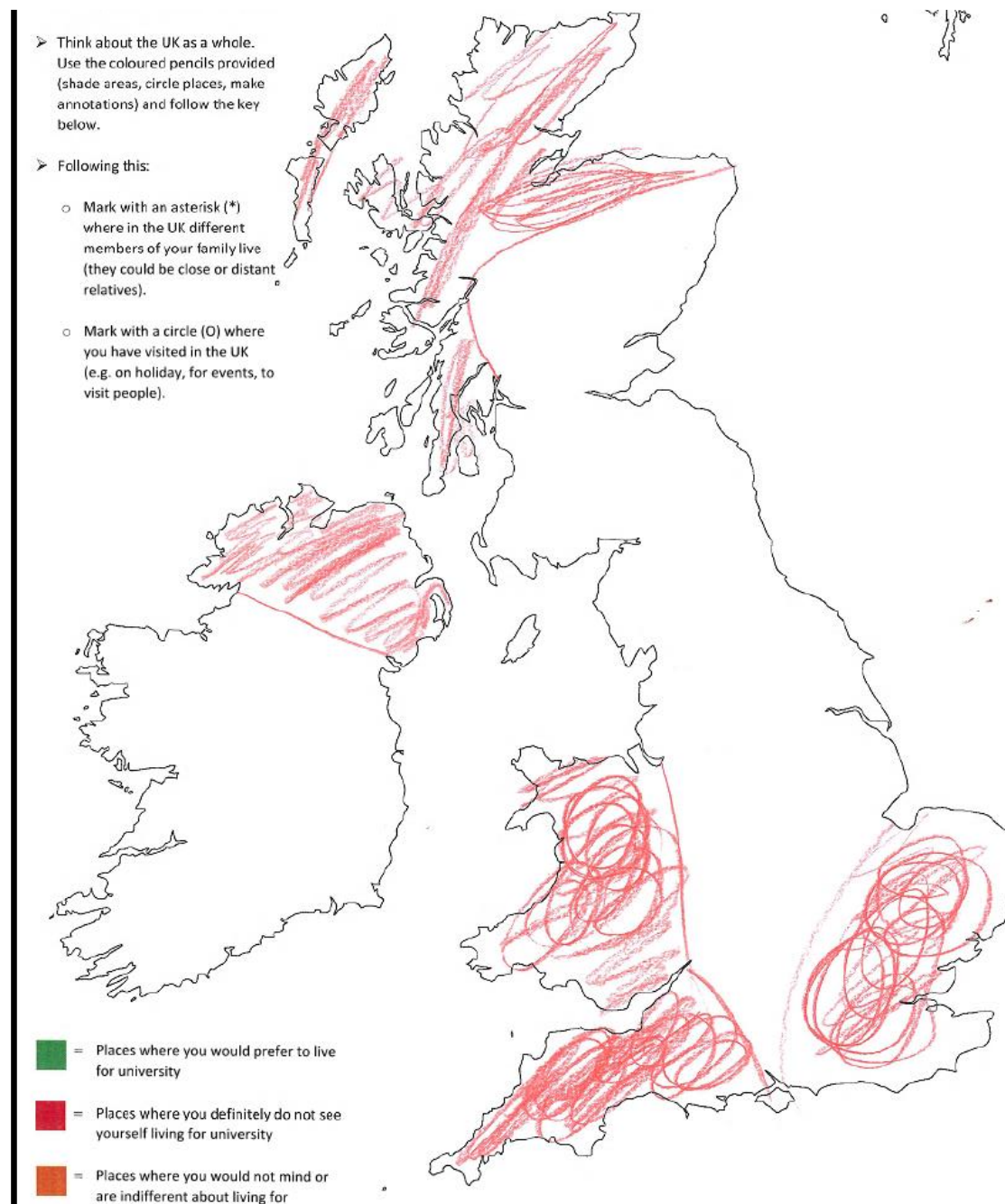
In the context of his school and its geographic locality, Dan perceives his peers to be occupying a privileged position in social space, but this social location is disturbed when considered in relation to peers from the south of England. 'It is like they have just come from the mines': Dan is expressing here how his Brasenose school peers stand in relation to their southern counterparts. The mapping method orientated Dan in a non-leading way to a broader relational geography of social class, and specifically middle class identity formation. Indeed, interviews always began with the broad question: 'tell me about your map'. Without Dan's map, it may not have been possible for such deep-seated relational geographies of middle class identity to have spontaneously emerged without the interviewee asking more directed questions. The map acted as a prompt for Dan himself to be reflexive about the geography of the UK, encompassing all of his past experiences, perceptions and
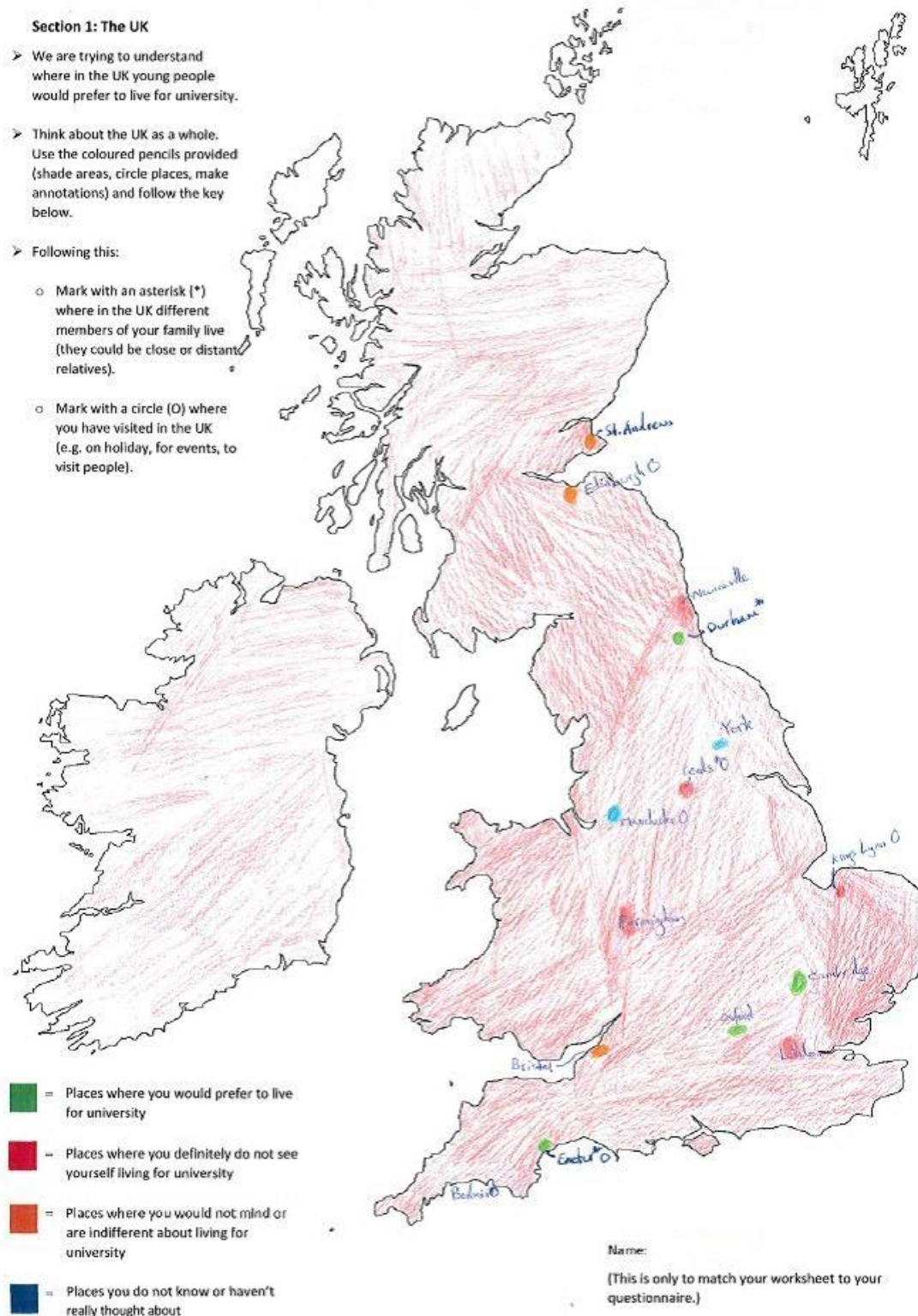
understandings of place and social class identity. Moreover, Dan's account underlines the importance of taking a broader geographic perspective in the research process when generating knowledge about social class – specifically in this case, the geographically contingent nature of middle class identity.

Towns, cities and regions

In the same way that the mapping method helped to expose the relational construction of social class identity, it also elicited the relational construction of towns, cities and regions within the UK as perceived by young people. Through their narratives about *where* in the country our participants would prefer to live for university, they also give glimpses into the relational construction of these places themselves. The places are understood in the minds of the young within the context of broader geographic structures of power, serving to dominate and oppress, and shaping the identities of places. The mapping method provided the means of affording voice to these structural mechanisms within the broad field – it orientated our participants away from a narrow focus on places in isolation of their broader context. It exposed the power relations within social space that maintain the positions occupied by different places. These power relations are implicit, deeply embedded and often unconscious, which is precisely why they are so powerful in maintaining the identities of places. The mapping method proved a useful means of explicating these place-based power relations, and we illustrate this point here through exploring our participants' construction of cities, regions and towns in the UK.

We argue here that the method elicited the ways in which relational geographies of power at the national and regional scale were embedded in particular local contexts. The relational geographies of power exposed by our mapping method were most apparent within narratives from those occupying the most privileged positions in social space, those young people from higher social class backgrounds attending the elite fee-paying schools in our sample. Leo attended an elite fee-paying school in London and was evidently from a privileged background, having parents who had attended university and were classified as NS-SEC group 1 according to their occupations. It was clear from how Leo approached the colouring of his map that he had a high degree of surety about specific places he preferred and did not prefer to live in the UK (figure 2).

Figure 2: Leo's Map (St. Alexander's Boys' School, London)

Section 1: The UK

➤ We are trying to understand where in the UK young people would prefer to live for university.

➤ Think about the UK as a whole. Use the coloured pencils provided (shade areas, circle places, make annotations) and follow the key below.

➤ Following this:

  ○ Mark with an asterisk (*) where in the UK different members of your family live (they could be close or distant relatives).

  ○ Mark with a circle (O) where you have visited in the UK (e.g. on holiday, for events, to visit people).

■ = Places where you would prefer to live for university

■ = Places where you definitely do not see yourself living for university

■ = Places where you would not mind or are indifferent about living for university

■ = Places you do not know or haven't really thought about

Name:

(This is only to match your worksheet to your questionnaire.)

His degree of precision here is indicative of the highly discerning and discriminatory approach Leo took to completing the map. Other participants would often colour swathes of the country green indicating a general preference for areas of the country they would like to live – such as the southern part of Scotland, encompassing many towns, cities and places. Leo, on the other hand, seemed to have coloured all of the map red before highlighting a few discrete enclaves of places he desired to

live for university and others he doesn't have strong feelings about either way.

Asking Leo the question 'tell us about your map' at the beginning of the interview, prompted him to explain some of the rationales and thinking behind the geographic preferences he had expressed through his colouring of the map.

> **You also coloured Newcastle in...**
> Yeah, that's red. I've never been to Newcastle but um, I know this is more of the kind of like stigma and reputation that surrounds it, um so I mean I know it's a very terrible example but, um things like Geordie shore and all the kind of reality TV shows that are based around people from Newcastle and I just, it's really not something that would appeal to me for university um, I just, I just really - 'cause although presumably parts of it are quite filled with you know, student activity, I think uh, I guess, I guess it's also kind of um, yeah I mean it's gotta be the reputation 'cause I have no other thing to base it off
> **....**
> **But it's not a place that you feel sort of, you could see yourself living?**
> No, I don't think I could. I think, yeah no I just - I guess in a similar to kind of, Birmingham but maybe for slightly different reasons I just couldn't see myself living there.

Further on during the interview, Leo goes on to talk about other places he had initially shaded orange:

> **Yeah**
> um and then St Andrews and Edinburgh, Edinburgh I guess I could maybe even shade green, but um I only visited it once and it was a while ago
> **Mm**
> but it did seem I guess quite the same as London, the same way that it was you do get a lot of tourists there and it's, it is quite you know buzzy atmosphere.

> *Leo, white British, NS-SEC 1, St. Alexanders Boys' School (Independent school, London)*

What is striking here is how the identities of places are narrated in relation to one another. By orienting Leo to thinking about broader geographies, rather than places in isolation to one another, we see here how the mapping method exposed Leo's understandings of how places stand in relation to one another. It could be interpreted that the way Leo constructs these places is in terms of the way he positions them relationally in terms of social class. Edinburgh is positively compared with London in terms of what he describes as their 'buzz', whereas Newcastle and Birmingham stand in opposition to these places for reasons that appear classed. The 'buzz' of London and Edinburgh is more than likely understood in terms of their position as political, cultural and financial centres of power within the UK. It could be argued then that an important mechanism maintaining the positioning of places, for Leo at least, is their levels of economic and cultural capital, as discussed elsewhere in terms of the geography of elites (Savage, 2015).

Away from the elite fee-paying schools of Manchester and London, our mapping method also allowed us to examine how these relational geographies are viewed by students in poorer and more peripheral working-class areas. Liam, who grew up in Liverpool and attended a comprehensive school in the city, indicated a strong local preference in his university choices (figure 3).

Figure 3: Liam's map (Bootlesfield School, Liverpool)
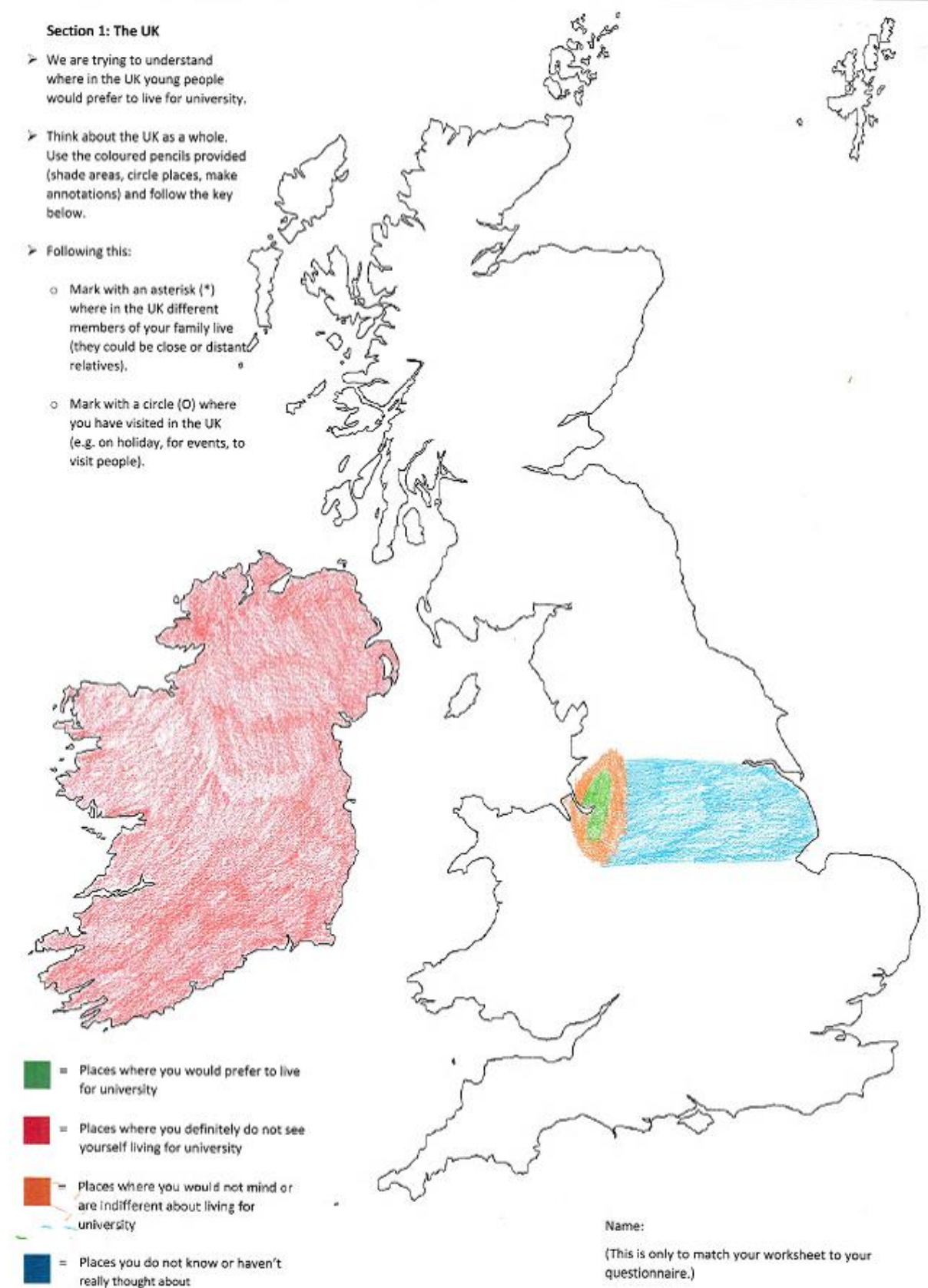
Narrating his map further during the interview, distinct legacies of the concentration of industrial

and working-class labour in Northern cities such as Liverpool were present in the relational geographies of place described:

> **Have you been over to Manchester much?**
> Uhh I have been into Manchester yeah, Trafford centre and all that.
> **Yeah. How do you feel on Manchester?**
> Yeah fine yeah it's similar to Liverpool in terms obviously it's another working class city and all of that ummm. Actually I think everyone from Manchester gets on with each other and all of that so it's not like the nicest of relationship with Liverpool people but.

Later on in the interview, Liam further elaborated on Liverpool in relation to other cities in the south:

> **Yeah yeah. Umm like, you said like a few times like Liverpool also Manchester, I think Sheffield as well somewhere as working class cities, how do you think that, can you say a bit more about what that means or?**
> Umm I think just like people that work hard. I think obviously your parents will work hard to better your lives and that, give the kids everything and that. Like I said just it's just … a working class thing innit, you want the best for your kids maybe and all that.
> **Do you think there are parts of the country that aren't like that maybe?**
> Umm I think there are parts in every city that are working class but obviously there are some bits that are more upper than working and that. Obviously down South there is probably a lot more of that.
> **Yeah anything specific down South?**
> Ummm … I think there is like a lot more, like I don't know like business owners and that down South with like higher authority, so they've got bigger wealth than other people so.

> *Liam, white British, White British, no parental experience of HE, Bootlefield School.*
> *Comprehensive academy. Liverpool.*

Here the relational geography of London as a centre of finance and business is contrasted with the identity of Liverpool and Manchester as working-class cities (Belchem, 2006). These metaphors of contrasting forms and experiences of work represent the uneven development of the UK economy and Liam's school was located in a working-class, predominantly white British neighbourhood of Liverpool. Traditional back-to-back terraces nestle right up to the two football stadiums of the famous Liverpool teams, with the stadiums dwarfing the other buildings in the area. These relational hierarchies of place and uneven development were woven into how young people in our study experienced and decided about where they wished to study. From talking to the young people, regardless of where they ultimately were destined for, it was clear that their perceptions of places were constructed in *relation* to a broader view of space. In the case of Liam, his view of Liverpool, Manchester and places in the south were shaped entirely in terms of where they fitted and stood in relation to one another. The mapping method exposed this relationality; it provided Liam with a means to articulate his deep-seated relational geographies of place by prompting him to think about the broader field during the interview.

More conventional stand-alone interview methods, which do not use this kind of mapping method as a prompt, may have made it more difficult to generate the kind of data collected from these young people in London and Liverpool. It would have been impossible for the interviewer to mention every region, town and city within the UK and include such a broad account of geography. Indeed, mentioning these geographic units itself would have been leading and orientated the interviewee to thinking in the interviewer's geographic frame of reference. Stand-alone interviews would have been reliant upon the interviewee to be cognisant of the mechanisms by which they routinely construct places (in relation to one another); which are likely to reflect deep-seated processes that they are unconscious and unaware of. Indeed, their unspoken and assumed nature is what makes the mechanisms powerful in maintaining dominant and oppressed spatial locations.

Figure 4: Sian's map (Ysgol Abereynon, South Wales)
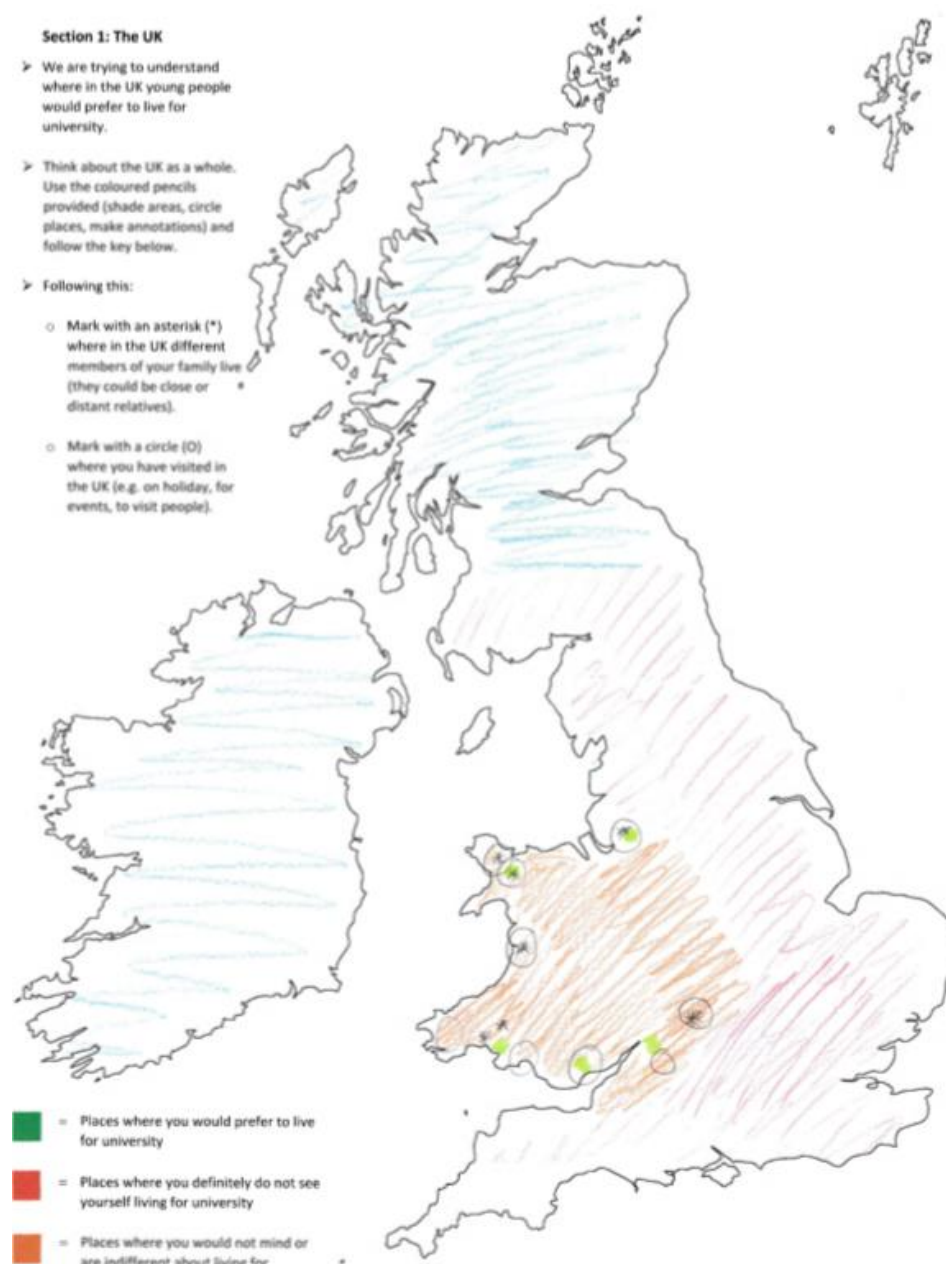
We can see a further example of the relational construction of towns, cities and localities in the UK from Sian's account of her map (figure 4). Sian was a Welsh speaker from a relatively advantaged background (parental experience of HE, and NS-SEC group 2), and attended a Welsh-medium school in a post-industrial coastal town of south wales. The geographic and socio-cultural location Sian was speaking from here afforded her a very different vantage-point to the young people living in London, Liverpool and Manchester described above. In narrating her map (figure 3), Sian made explicit the ways she constructed different towns and cities in *relation* to her immediate locality:

> **What's your feeling about London?**
> I like London. It's very nice. Um, but I have... I know two people that have gone there to do the Midwifery course 'cus it's quite big there I think and they have huge hospitals and things. And from what I've heard they really enjoy it and that was their first option was London. But I think, I'm a person that likes a town, well, I like cities and like y'know. But I don't like that big of a city. I feel like it would be quite hectic and I'd be just confused.
> **Yeah.**
> Because of the amount of people that are there. The tube, the, y'know. I probably couldn't drive there because it's so busy. Y'know it's a very hectic city and I'm not used to that, I live in Abereynon, I'm not used to busy towns, cities. So, although it's a nice place and it's good for midwifery, I just think it... That busy a place is not suitable for me. Like, I like a place that has got everything but you feel like it's smaller than what it is. Do you know what I mean? Like you feel, that there's only a group of you but actually it's quite big. Y'know.
> **Right.**
> Like Cardiff is big. But you don't feel like it's a capital city. Do you know what I mean? There's everything there but it's not as hectic as London.
> **Yeah.**
> Everyone goes to London don't they. It's a bit mental. That's the only thing, it's just I can't imagine myself somewhere so busy and hectic and that's really it. But, then again if I did want to go there I would but I don't really want to go there. It's not... Y'know I thought about it but, I'm not that bothered about it.

> *Sian, white British, NS-SEC 2, parental experience of HE, Ysgol Abereynon (Welsh-medium school, post-industrial coastal town, South Wales)*

Contained within Sian's narrative is her sense of what makes a 'comfortable place' where she could imagine living, constructed relationally through her account of Cardiff, London and her hometown Abereynon. Contained within Sian's account is an inherently relational construction of each place mentioned in terms of how they stand in *relation* to one another. Abereynon *is* Abereynon because it is *not* London or Cardiff – that is to say, Abereynon is only constructed as a 'small town' which lacks educational opportunities to study Midwifery because of where it stands more broadly in the geography of opportunities in the UK. Cardiff is positioned as somewhere in between London and Abereynon – having the benefits of a bigger city in terms of opportunities, but not what are perceived by Sian to be the drawbacks of being a place that is too big and overwhelming. Cardiff *is* Cardiff because it is *not* London or Aberynon - it is not the 'hectic' capital of England where everybody wants to be and it is not the small town of Aberynon where not much goes on. Her sense and feelings about Cardiff derive from how it stands in relation to London and Aberynon. The identity of Cardiff is held together by where it stands relationally with other places that Sian has subjective knowledge of, and feelings towards. The way in which Sian constructs these places also provides a glimpse into the construction of her own identity. The way that Sian views herself as not 'fitting in' within her imagined 'London', but seeing herself in what is imagined to be 'Cardiff' gives some insight into how Sian constructs her sense of self. In the same way that Dan strongly aligned himself to the 'northern' identity he constructs, one interpretation of Sian's narrative could be that

her sense of self is close to what has been written about elsewhere in terms of communitarian and close-knit Welsh identities (Barker, 1972; Mannay, 2013).

Concluding comments

The presence of borders and boundaries to demarcate and discern the identities of people and places has been a strong feature of much social science research. Sociological, spatial and urban studies research has been strongly influenced in recent decades by a relational approach to studying people and places. This approach takes account of the broader set of structures at the macro level when examining individual groups or places, in order to see how the web of connections that exist more broadly work to maintain the positionality of actors and places. It is the nature of these connections which is of interest when advancing our understandings of the ways in which the identities of people and places are constructed and maintained over time. Methodologically, generating knowledge about these relations that exist within social space poses significant challenges. It is possible to identify the manifestations of such relations – the class categories themselves, or particular geographic localities – but exposing the hidden power structures holding the categories in place within social space is more difficult. These relations are in many ways unobservable, they are unspoken, tacit and unconscious. Indeed, there power derives from being assumed and 'given' in maintaining the positionality of groups and places, with no rationalisation sought or required.

Bourdieu attempted to expose the nature of relationships maintaining the positioning of groups within social space using the quantitative technique of multiple correspondence analysis. This method is one approach to detecting underlying structures within a data-set, or in Bourdieu's terms, the mechanisms and ties maintaining the positioning of actors within social space. The detection of classes, based upon a geometric mapping of multiple associations of different categories, provides unique insight about classes and the factors that are important in their construction. Integral to the design of this analytic approach is the assumption that the identities of groups and individuals are determined by their positioning relative to others within the broader field. It is an explicitly relational methodology through its very design. In putting forward our 'mapping tool' here, used within the context of qualitative interviewing, we have also attempted to account for the broader field and the mechanisms by which people and places are held together within social space. Through orienting our participants towards the broader field, we have shown here its affordances for capturing their tacit understandings about how class identity and place-based identities are constituted. It acted as a tool and vehicle for participants to voice their deep-rooted sense of the relational construction of groups and places, in terms of economic, cultural and social structures that prevail within social space. These macro level structures were brought to the surface through participants' active consideration of the 'other' through the mapping tool.

The mapping tool was intended to be used within the context of qualitative interviews, and acts as a creative means for participants to articulate *their* own socio-spatial imaginaries, not unduly framed by an external map-maker, which are made sense of through the interview process. In our own research, the maps were integral to the interview process and not used as the only method of data collection. That said, the collection of over 1,000 maps through the project represents a rich data-set in its own right. Indeed, emergent work in qualitative geographic information science (GIS) (Jung, 2009; Teixeira, 2018; Wilson, 2009) has begun to develop innovative ways of analysing these kind of spatial data produced by participants themselves. It could be possible to analyse the collection of maps as a data-set in their own right, but this poses significant analytic challenges in doing so. A key challenge is one of interpretation and representation, in terms of understanding the intended meaning behind these expressions of young people's geographies, which often requires talking to the young people themselves. One approach to analysing the maps is to use a kind of content

analysis approach, for example, overlaying each map with a grid and numerically ordering their preferences as indicated by the different colourings of squares on the grid. However, often the maps created by young people inaccurately (according to conventional maps) placed different towns and cities, which could produce errors in any content analysis. Moreover, these 'errors' are data in and of themselves – it could be valuable to examine which groups of young people do not reproduce the map-makers 'accurate' version of the UK's geography. Another approach could be to carry out more inductive thematic analysis of the maps, which could address this problem and also potentially develop richer findings.

The mapping tool created through this project has been limited to a narrow geographic range. Going forward, there exists enormous potential to expand the map to encompass a wider geographic reach, and examining socio-spatial imaginaries from vantage points beyond the UK. Examining how social groups across different nation-states perceive world geographies could yield important insights into processes that go beyond the confines of single nation states. One contemporary example of such processes is the emergence of a Global Middle Class (GMC) (Ball & Nikita, 2014). The mapping tool could provide a valuable means of eliciting the imaginaries of an emergent GMC, and generating much-needed knowledge about the global mechanisms that are working to produce this emergent group.

Funding details

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