Exploring local pride and connection to heritage among 16 to 18 year olds in the North East

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Introduction and Background

Pride is perhaps one of the most complex emotions to feel, and to quantify (Collins 2019: 288). A sense of connection to one's locality can incorporate sentiments of pride and may involve feelings of belongingness to a certain place or community (Pretty et al. 2003: 273; Scannell and Gifford 2009: 1). Recently, pride and connection have been discussed in a rather two-dimensional light within the Levelling-Up White Paper, assuming that areas which have been 'left behind' in government policies have a diminishing sense of local pride due to a lack of green spaces, higher levels of crime, the loss of high streets and economic decline (Shaw et al. 2022: 36).

By contrast, scholars who have investigated emotional attachment to place, and its associated heritage, have argued that despite the North East being one of these areas, it has some of the highest levels of civic pride amongst its adult population (Shaw et al. 2022: 36). Additionally, investigations which consider the emotional attachment of young people to their heritage sector have proven that increasing a young person's sense of pride and connection in relation to their local heritage can significantly impact their overall attitude on place and community (Stefaniak et al. 2017; Pearson and Plevyak 2020; Domšić 2021; Blamire et al. 2022). As there has yet to be an investigation which directly addresses these concepts amongst young people in the North East, this article therefore offers an original contribution to the attitudes and behaviours of young people in the North East today (Pretty et al. 2003: 276).

The older age range of young people (those 16 and over) is consistently displayed in national surveys like Heritage Taking Part (DCMS 2020),¹ Heritage Public Engagement Group (Historic Environment Forum 2019)² and the Museum Audience Report (The Audience Agency 2018: 3), as the most under-represented and least engaged age group. The North East's heritage sector has been left behind in terms of the number of youth engagement heritage projects and large funding programmes. The consequences of this have been exhibited in recent work at Bishop Auckland, highlighting that a vast percentage of young people do not know their local heritage well and would migrate from the North East at their first opportunity (Gerrard 2022: 13). Young people in the North East in data collection from 2017 to 2018 were also ranked as the second lowest age group for volunteering and for visiting in almost all types of heritage site (DCMS 2018: 11).³

There have been some successful youth engagement projects in the North East, with organisations including Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums (TWAM), Beamish Museum and Culture Bridge organising work placements, volunteering opportunities and youth groups, such as the Beamish Youth Group. Yet a reoccurring issue in many of these is rapid funding depletion and lack of support from major funders. A current

barrier in the North East is 'the short-term, project-based nature of the majority of activities (largely due to the means by which they were funded)' (Dickenson 2021: 126). In 2019, the Heritage Lottery's 'Kick the Dust' campaign released its list of youth projects with significant funding, with no project planned for the North East. This decision was likely made due to a lack of resources, such as English Heritage staff and venues across the North East which were not able to sustain projects in these areas.

Project Title	Grant Awarded	Organisation	Location of project activities
Norfolk Journeys	£776,500	Norfolk Museums and Archaeological Service	Norfolk
Y Heritage	£707,500	The Y, Leicester	Leicestershire
Keeping it Wild	£886,600	London Wildlife Trust	Greater London
Future Proof Parks	£919,200	Groundwork	England-wide
Our Shared Cultural Heritage	£886,600	The British Council	Manchester, Glasgow, International (India, Bangladesh, Pakistan)
Shout Out Loud	£994,500	English Heritage	England-wide
Reimagine, Remake, Replay	£949,600	The Nerve Centre	Belfast
Hope Streets	£998,800	Curious Minds	North West England
Scotland 365	£776,000	National Museums Scotland	Scotland
Don't Settle	£696,700	Beatfreeks Arts Ltd.	Birmingham
Ignite Yorkshire	£962,300	IVE	Yorkshire
Hands on Heritage	£874,500	National Museum Wales	Wales

Table 1 - List of all current National Lottery Heritage funded 'Kick the Dust' projects (Heritage Fund 2019).

It is notable that the North East-based organisation Case4Culture have recently changed their goals to not include Children and Young People, stating they have made 'significant progress...in celebrating local pride...' (Case4Culture 2023: 1)⁴ with young people. They provided examples such as Tall Ships, Lindisfarne Gospels and the 2025 Passenger Rail Bicentenary, but refrained from providing any specific details as to the efficiency or successfulness of youth participation within those examples, suggesting these projects were not embedded within wider youth participation efforts (Case4Culture 2023: 1).

Consequences of learning about local heritage

Scholars such as Mitchell and Elwood, Severcan and Grimshaw and Mates over the last ten years have successfully shown that a combined local history and geography pedagogy can lead to a greater interest in civic participation from young people

(Severcan 2015: 255; Severcan 2018: 2192; Grimshaw and Mates, 2022a and 2022b). These projects conducting heritage-based activities and place-knowledge learning in schools have overwhelmingly concluded that local heritage participation increased children's attachment to place.

Local heritage-based projects with young people have shown a series of emotional responses before versus after completion, as seen in Mitchell and Elwood's mapping of local history project which saw an increase in a sense of pride and additionally a desire from the young people to support larger communal issues (Mitchell and Elwood 2012: 148). This was then further evidenced in another school-based project conducted by Pearson and Plevyak which highlighted young people's increase in civic intentions to improve their local community, and an increase in pride about their local community after learning and engaging in their local history (Pearson and Plevyak 2020: 135).

Methodology

When gathering data from young people, it is vital to address both the biases and barriers which have previously occurred in research. Many other studies which have obtained data from young people have done so via a classroom setting, e.g. using a teacher's opinion verbatim as to the impact certain projects have had upon their publics, for example in Grimshaw and Mates (2022a; 2022b) and Historic England (2022a). Instead, the research in this article prioritised gathering data directly from young people themselves. It was additionally aimed to gather information from young people who were not already engaged in some kind of heritage or museum project, to avoid collecting data from those who already had a biased view of the sector or engagement projects (Hughes and Moscardo 2019: 519). Due to the limited nature of the project, and restrictions in place for working with under-18s, socio-economic data could not be collected. However, the survey was distributed to three schools across the North East region, as this allowed for an easy way to gain access to a pool of young people, and a higher likelihood of reaching young people with a mix of previous experiences and opinions.

The use of young people aged 16 to 18 was chosen due to the lack of undivided attention to heritage within this category, but also because an older audience has a higher likelihood of cognitively understanding concepts such as place attachment, pride in place, connection, and civic engagement (Grimshaw and Mates 2022b: 1348). This project seeks to investigate the links between person (the young people as actors within their environment), process (affective emotional attachment to pride/connection) and place (the North East) (Scannell and Gifford 2009). This study additionally employed concepts relating to place attachment and how a person can be bonded to a place (Scannell and Gifford 2009: 2), which has not been explored before in this region with this age group.

Using a mixed-method approach (Terrell 2015) allowed for the collection of the demographical habits of young people aged 16 to 18 in the North East, and qualitative questions regarding pride and connection (Hughes and Moscardo 2019: 52). The instruments used for data collection in this study have been chosen to best extract the extent to which young people feel pride and connection, but in a way

which would not confuse the participants or make the completion of the questionnaire draining (Strange et al. 2003: 337). For this, a combination of short-answer questions, long-answer questions, tick boxes, and closed-answer questions were used (Saris Gallhofer 2014). To consider the complexity of pride and connection, Likert scales assessed the young people's standpoint on a series of prompts and statements.

Results and Discussion

A total of 78 participants completed the survey. These schools cover a wide general demographic represented by their locality, those being Blaydon, Durham City and Morpeth. The results show a correlation between young people who have a high level of pride and connection having a higher likelihood of relaying local knowledge and being more likely to actively engage or want to engage in their local heritage. Though full demographic data was not available, trends within the responses reveal gaps in engagement. Through this, we can observe differences in responses to the rest of the survey, depending on whether the young people actively engaged/sought out local heritage experiences, or did not. Accordingly, we are also able to identify these various standpoints and their relationship to a sense of pride and connection. To demonstrate this disparity, some respondents can act as case studies:

	Participant A	Participant B	Participant C	Participant D
Visiting patterns and behaviours to heritage sites	Last visit – 21 st February	Last visit – one year ago	Last visit – never	Last visit - a couple of years
and museums	Regularly visit every few months	Regularly visit at least once a year	Would only visit with school	ago Never
				regularly visits
Do they actively seek out engagement with museums and heritage in their local area?	Yes	Yes	No	No

	Participant A	Participant B	Participant C	Participant D
Reasoning for the question above	'I love history and discovering what, and who, has helped shape the world we live in today. Museums and heritage sites are bursting with interesting stories and they can make me feel inspired while always igniting a spark of wonder.'	'I love history, and I think that local history in particular is very important to know about.'	'I'm not interested.'	'Don't have much interest in it so wouldn't be my first choice of where to go.'
Previous knowledge of North East industrial heritage	Knew all key figures; very extensive and specific knowledge	Knew the three male key figures; discussed their knowledge in relation to their neighbourhood area	Only knew Armstrong and very general, such as 'we used to do mining.'	Knew Stephenson and Armstrong, knew of coal mining but 'not in great detail.'
Have they previously taken part in a youth engagement history/herita ge/museum project?	No	No	Answered 'beamish' but did not provide a specific project	No
They answered that they 'agree' with these statements	Felt a connection to North East heritage Felt pride about North East heritage Felt pride about being from the North East Keen to be more involved in engagement projects That there are opportunities for heritage and museum engagement for young people in the North East	-	-	Felt pride about North East heritage Felt Pride about being from the North East

	Participant A	Participant B	Participant C	Participant D
They answered that they 'disagree' with these statements	Would want to move from the North East	Would want to move from the North East That there are opportunities for heritage and museum engagement for young people in the North East That young adults have their voices heard	Felt pride about North East heritage Felt a connection to North East heritage That young adults have their voices heard	Keen to be more involved in engageme nt projects
They answered that they 'strongly agree' with these statements	-	Felt a connection to North East heritage Felt Pride about being from the North East. Felt pride about North East heritage	Felt Pride about being from the North East	-
They answered that they 'strongly disagree' with these statements	-	-	Would want to move from the North East Keen to be more involved in engagement projects That there are opportunities for heritage and museum engagement for young people in the North East	-

	Participant A	Participant B	Participant C	Participant D
They answered that they 'feel neutral' with these statements	That young adults have their voices heard	Keen to be more involved in engagement projects		Felt a connection to North East heritage Would want to move from the North East That there are opportunitie s for heritage and museum engageme nt for young people in the North East. That young adults have their voices heard
Recommenda tion to encourage more young people to be involved in the North East's heritage and museum sector	Very detailed recommendations including; 'a larger focus on subthemes such as art, feminism, LGBTQ+, etc.' exhibited in these museum and heritage sites in the North East	'If there was more about local history in the school curriculum.'	'no'	'I'm not sure.'

Table 2 - Compilation of results from the questionnaire (Author 2023).

Level of Pride

The most significant outcome for a sense of pride was that there was a slightly lower number of young people who agreed or strongly agreed with feeling pride in North East heritage compared to pride in the North East generally, meaning more young people disagreed or strongly disagreed that they felt pride in their heritage.

I feel a sense of pride about North East heritage

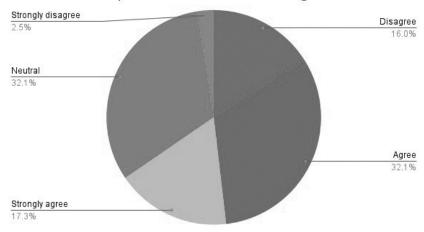


Figure 1 - Responses to Question 13, 'On a scale of 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree', please indicate your response to these prompts. [I feel a sense of pride about North East heritage]' (Author 2023).

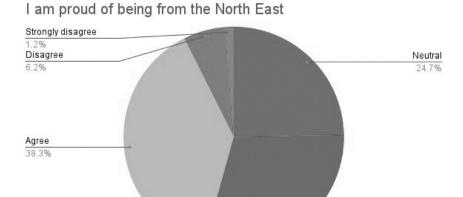


Figure 2 - Responses to Question 14, 'On a scale of 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree', please indicate your response to these prompts. [I am proud of being from the North East] (Author 2023).

Additionally, there were more neutral responses for pride in heritage, potentially indicating that they could not answer the question as they have no experience to refer to in order to assess their own level of pride. This is an important factor to note, with

Strongly agree 29.6% most literature regarding this concept highlighting that a sense of pride was stimulated because of participating in engagement projects (Menkshi et al. 2021: 121; Mitchell and Elwood 2012: 148; Pearson and Plevyak 2020: 139).

Pride was also assessed through respondents' enthusiasm in their answers and their current level of North East industrial heritage knowledge (Mills et al. 2019: 21). Additionally, the same young people who were enthusiastic and knowledgeable about North East heritage were more likely to point out issues about wider society, such as LGBTQ+ rights, the role of migration and globalisation. The responses indicate that young people who have recently engaged with heritage and provided a positive response for why they actively seek out heritage, strongly agreed that they felt a sense of pride and connection. They were also more likely to provide better recommendations for the heritage sector. This is perhaps one of the most important findings in terms of using this research for sector improvement, as it indicates that the more engaged a young person is in their heritage, the higher their sense of pride and connection and therefore the more active they are in being a spokesperson for their peers.

Sense of Connection

Connection was assessed using Scannell and Gifford's (2009) person-process-place framework and emotional place connection. For the 'person' part of the framework, young people were asked about their desire to move away, whilst 'process' was investigated by enquiring about their sense of connection. Given the results for the former statement, we can suggest that the surveyed young people have a strong sense of connection to place, with 40 out of 78 young people disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that they would move away. This result corresponds to National Lottery research which has shown that the number of young people who are active in their local community is increasingly on the rise (The National Lottery 2022).6 However, considerably fewer young people felt connected to their local heritage.

I feel a connection to the heritage of the North East

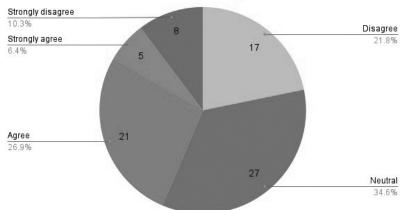


Figure 3 - Responses to Question 12, 'On a scale of 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree', please indicate your response to these prompts. [I feel a connection to the heritage of the North East]' (Author 2023).

Feeling a sense of connection to your local area directly relates to theories concerning community connection and wellbeing (Historic England 2022c;⁷ National Trust 2017), an important factor of studies on the contribution heritage can have on society (Blamire et al. 2022:3). As such, due to the disparity between the number of young people who feel a sense of place attachment to the North East, versus those who feel connected to the North East's heritage and seek to learn more about it, it can be argued that young people of the region are missing a sense of connection which could be boosted by engagement in a local heritage project (Blamire et al. 2022: 9; The National Lottery 2022).⁸ However, we must be aware that the responses to 'feeling connected' could be the result of heritage meaning something different to different people, or that their sense of connection to place is completely distanced from heritage involvement or history engagement.

A total of 15 respondents provided specific place-based local heritage knowledge and were able to link this to wider North East industrial heritage, including one respondent making a direct heritage link to the town they grew up in stating, 'the town I used to grow up in... was a coal mining village and I explored one of the mines once' and, 'mainly about the coal mining and Margret Thatcher, but also some about the shipbuilding along the key side. This was mainly taught to me by my grandfather who used to work in the coal mines'.

The amount of specific place-based heritage knowledge was greater than initially anticipated, especially considering how many young people said they do not feel a sense of pride and connection to their local heritage. What it may show is a distribution of local knowledge via other means, such as familial oral histories, which is common in deindustrialisation communities (Canaday-Talley et al. 2019: 77). Still, the overall level of local heritage knowledge was varied, with many respondents simply stating phrases such as 'coal mining', 'the world war', or 'boat making' for what they knew about their local heritage. Their engagement with their heritage could therefore be categorised as a more passive or observational relationship. For example, one participant noted, 'there is a big wheel where I live in representation of coal mines' as their example of heritage engagement projects. Such forms of engagement with heritage may be the reason for a lack of connection to place (Drotner et al. 2017: 464) and could be improved through local heritage projects which specifically seek to explore the way young people feel about their area (Domšić 2021: 158).

Only 5.1 per cent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that young people like themselves have their voices heard. The overall sentiment of feeling disconnected from their locality could have serious implications for how a young person connects and feels pride in their area, as they may feel excluded from their community (Canaday-Tallet et al. 2019: 1). As such, heritage engagement which allows young people to be at the centre of change and feel like their voices will be heard may allow young people in the North East to increase their sense of connection to their locality. The fact that no participant mentioned any large-scale, nationally funded projects is significant; highlighting the previously explored issue that the North East has more short-term, one-off projects which is influencing the scope and reach heritage engagement is having to these young people (Dickenson 2021: 126).

Conclusion and recommendations for the sector

It is important to provide a space for the young people's recommendations to come to the forefront. The recommendations were quantified and coded by key types of needs and wants to identify core themes which the respondents thought were important to increase engagement with young people.

Do not know/nothing	18 individual mentions
Interactivity/more hands-on	15 individual mentions
Social media/better promotion	12 individual mentions
Better links with school/curriculum	10 individual mentions
More local history	10 individual mentions
Finance issues addressed	6 individual mentions
Youth-led projects	4 individual mentions
Relate to current issues in society	4 individual mentions
Physical access/transportation issues addressed	4 individual mentions
Quality of exhibitions/improved offer	4 individual mentions

Table 3 - Responses to the question: 'I think there are a lot of opportunities for engaging in heritage and museums in the North East', coded by theme (Author 2023).

The data is dominated by the response of 'do not know/nothing' which may stem from the young people's pre-existing lack of engagement; that they feel like they cannot give an informed response, or from those who are simply not engaged in heritage and museums. Although some scholars and studies may disregard data which alters their analysis (Boynton 2004: 1374), it was felt that this was an injustice towards the young participants and their voices, and so all responses from all young people remained in the analysis (Bell 2007). The rest of the recommendations suggest more interactive or hands-on projects, better links with schools and the national curriculum, and more opportunities to engage with their local history. There was also a call for the museum and heritage sector to better promote their opportunities, which was particularly mentioned by young people who do not actively seek out engagement, with one participant stating, 'it would have to be suggested by others'. Yet, as the results for eagerness have indicated, young people would like to be more engaged in local heritage projects. It is therefore encouraging that there is a very visible eagerness for further engagement by a significant proportion of the respondents.

This paper has been able to fill the significant void concerning youth engagement in smaller localities, and the sense of pride and connection of young people in the North East. Particularly, it has been able to offer a new perspective, expanding on Blamire

et al.'s (2022) first comprehensive review of young people's emotional connection to local heritage, to provide an insight into the same issue, but on a more localised scale. The benefit of a more locally-focused uncovering of pride and connection is the ability to make recommendations and projects specific to the North East's museum and heritage sector, like those seen in other place-based heritage projects such as Ignite Yorkshire and English Heritage's 'Shout out Loud' projects. For Ignite Yorkshire in particular, the similarities between the North East and Yorkshire regarding (de) industrialised heritage proves this to be a strong backdrop for similar projects to excel in the North East. For this region, it is especially important due to the socio-political backdrop that ideas of pride in place are situated against (i.e. Levelling-Up), and the lack of funding in youth heritage outreach projects more generally.

Additionally, the data concerning the higher sense of pride in the North East has highlighted that young voices need to be heard by higher powers. By putting young people at the forefront of this paper it has shown that young people can provide alternative perspectives, an integral part of the youth-led model (Burke et al. 2017: 590). This, in turn, may improve the overall level of connection to place which could have an impact on young people's drive to engage in civic responsibilities (Stefaniak et al. 2017: 217); but until it is felt that their voices will be heard, this goal cannot be achieved.

Recommendations for the sector, drawing upon the combination of literature and findings, would begin with further consultations with larger groups of young people, ensuring that the 'currently unengaged' criteria is still met. From this, a more detailed look into socio-economic and demographic influencing factors could aid in understanding where the main gaps that need to be filled are. The long-term goal would then be a collaborative approach, utilising organisations, community groups and heritage or museum institutions to begin funding bids to kick-start sustainable projects focused solely on young people (like 'Kick the Dust').

The recommendations from young people also highlighted that they would wish to see more local history being taught as part of their curriculum. Therefore, to keep in mind the disadvantages of purely school-based engagement outlined by other scholars (Adams et al. 2014), it may be possible to begin a project which is situated in schools, but offers out-of-school additional activities which expand upon themes covered. There is not a comparative project to compare this suggestion with, particularly not one targeted at teenagers and young adults. Arguably this suggests the need for solutions to be implemented within wider local and national governmental policies, requiring a holistic and collaborative approach between the sector, larger stakeholders and the young people themselves.

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Endnotes

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