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Rap and Political Participation: Using Rap as a Creative Method in Research with Children and Young People.

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Abstract

This article explores how rap music workshops can be an effective method when researching neighbourhood regeneration and refurbishment with children and young people, especially in disadvantaged communities. The article draws on research with 78 children and young people in a large social housing estate which is undergoing regeneration and refurbishment in Cork City in the South of Ireland. The focus of this article is on a sub-group of 6 teenagers who participated in a rap workshop. The research demonstrates that rap music workshops are an insightful data collection method, particularly in contexts where rap music is already an embedded part of the local youth culture. This research also reveals how children and young people have the imaginative capacity to make informed analysis of their communities and that they hold a strong desire to influence the decision making process. This article will be of interest to researchers concerned with creative methodologies designed to elicit and understand children and young people's experiences and perspectives.

Key Words

Rap, Participation, Research, Regeneration, Children, Young People, Creative Methods.

Introduction

Participation in public policy decision making is increasingly recognised as a right for all citizens and good practice in policy making. This is particularly important where major public policy interventions such as housing estate regeneration directly impact on the lives of specific groups (Healy, 1997). Generally in urban planning a principal informing consultations between local authorities and communities has been that it is with adults, and that those adults represent the views of everybody including children (Goodwin & Young 2013). UNICEF (2012) expressed concern that children and young people are often absent from community consultations despite their participation leading to better decisions for them; providing insights for policy making, budgeting and service delivery; helping build capacity for engaging in democratic processes; helping children stay safe; and making adult decision-makers more accountable (Lundy & Stalford, 2013). A central concern is finding appropriate means to ascertain their views. This article explores how rap music workshops can be used as an effective qualitative and participatory research method when researching with children and young people, especially in disadvantaged communities.

The research was funded by the Irish Research Council, Irish Department of Children and Youth Affairs (Children's Participation Unit) and the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government as part of a government strategy to enhance opportunities for children's voices

to be heard across a range of public policy areas. The purpose was to contribute to the development of national consultative processes and to share the findings with the local council responsible for the regeneration programme. The children and young people who participated in the study reside in Knocknaheeny, a large social housing estate in Cork City, in the south of Ireland. Social housing in Ireland is targeted at low income households, is spatially segregated from the wider housing stock but it is viewed as providing affordable housing for low income households in the face of market failure (Norris, 2013). The estate was constructed during the 1970s, has a population of over 4,000 and is now undergoing a major regeneration and refurbishment programme. The masterplan implementation comprises physical, environmental and socio-economic strands involving house demolition and rebuilding, urban design and public space interventions, and social and economic initiatives (Housing Agency 2011). All households affected by the regeneration can choose to stay in the area and the housing stock remains in public ownership. The estate is the most deprived area of the city and contains high concentrations of socio-economic disadvantage. Census data shows that the estate is characterised by high levels of unemployment as a result of the collapse of traditional industries such as car and tyre manufacturing and ship building from the 1980s onwards. The estate is also characterised by high levels of lone parenthood and low levels of educational attainment and home ownership rates compared to the wider city. It reflects Wacquant's (2008, 2-3) thesis of advanced marginality as a bounded and segregated space emblematic of the "post-Fordist city as a result of the uneven development of the capitalist economics and the recoiling of welfare states".

Imbrosio (2016) has criticised regeneration programmes for their destructive and displacement impacts on communities and their reinforcement of the stigmatisation of poor areas. A meritocratic ideology underlies many regeneration interventions which focuses on deficits in infrastructure, education, families and neighbourhoods (Imbrosio, 2016). While poor housing and living conditions must be tackled, regeneration can serve to legitimate existing social arrangements and according to Hancock and Mooney (2013: 59) work to

> 'divert attention away from the structural and institutional failures that produce and reproduce poverty, as well as neglecting any sense that the workings of the capitalist economy, whether in a period of crisis or not, also create the conditions for emerging social problems as well as social and economic inequality'.

In the Irish context, Bissett (2009) has analysed the power differentials in the relationship between the State and local communities revealing contested understandings of regeneration between democratic and egalitarian models and market-driven considerations.

The article contains four sections. The first explores discourses on children's rights, the second examines research on rap music, the third presents the rap music workshop methodology in practice, and the final section discusses the lyrical content of the rap, highlighting how the results of the rap music workshop produced refined, fine grained and valuable data. It will be argued that the rap music workshop produced a medium for participants to express opinions about their community and the ongoing regeneration programme. This approach will be of interest to researchers concerned with developing creative methodologies designed to elicit children and young people's experiences and perspectives.

Children's Rights and Participation

Philips argues that children are excluded from participation in decision making on two grounds: 'Their social class (euphemised as "low educational attainment") is deemed to leave them "unskilled" to make decisions; their generational position as "humans becoming" (rationalised through the child development paradigm) is deemed to leave them "unready" to make decisions' (2004: 168). James argues that children have been, and continue to be, simultaneously positioned as both vulnerable and irresponsible (2011). However, Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) highlights the importance of affording children the right to express their views on matters affecting them. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009) (UNCRC) has asserted that '…the right of all children to be heard and taken seriously constitutes one of the fundamental values of the convention'. Respecting children as rights holders means they should be afforded due recognition in terms of the validity and relevance of their experiences and views in contributing to governmental processes.

Participation rights are seen as the most radical part of the UNCRC because they give substance to the agency and capabilities of children, not just focusing on their dependency and vulnerability (Earls 2011). Some commentators argue that this could lead to significant change for the status of children in society, whereby the best interests of the child are decided through involvement of the child, what Keane (2008: 16) calls 'the age of the child citizen'. Lundy (2007) argues that children's right to a voice must be facilitated by child-friendly information, time to understand the issues that affect them and fun activities to elicit their views. Therefore, the power differentials between adults and children must be acknowledged and the entitlements of children must be at the centre of the deliberative process. Beyond this, according to Percy-Smith and Thomas, '…children and young people's participation cannot be understood in isolation from the cultural, social and political contexts in which it occurs' (2010: 357). This is of particular importance in relation to children from disadvantaged communities, who often experience marginalisation and disempowerment. This point has been emphasised by Mayo who argues that young people have been assumed to be trouble while children have been assumed to be incapable of participating in any significant way. 'Until very recently, to suggest that even relatively young children have the capacity to make valuable contributions to planning the regeneration of their neighbourhoods would have been to think the unthinkable despite mounting evidence to the contrary' (Mayo and Taylor, 2001: 41).

RAP, Young People and Political Participation

Since its inception as part of the hip hop cultural movement in the 1970s rap music has been a conduit for political discourse (Neal 2004). Rap music has been embraced by both educationalists and youth and community workers as having the potential to reach out to marginalised youth (Harris 2013), and raising critical consciousness about issues affecting their communities (Allen, 1996). Drawing on Freire's critical pedagogy (1990) some scholars have labelled this approach as 'Critical Hip Hop Pedagogy' (Hill 2009; Parmar 2009; Porfilio and Viola 2012) or as a 'transformative pedagogy' (O'Neill, 2012). The use of music in educational and youth work spaces has also been termed 'Edutainment' (Allen 1996), the purpose of which is to engage learners through participation in artistic activities. Harris notes an '…explosion of hip hop and rap

programs, projects and strategies used by artists, teachers and scholars, not only to engage young people who struggle with traditional school, but to better understand the way they (and we) learn' (2013: 124).

However, in recent years rap has emerged as a contested practice and even developed a negative reputation for supporting 'nihilism' (Turner 2010) where certain types of rap music, such as gangsta rap and grime, are perceived as decisive in the corruption of urban youth cultures through the validation of crime and deviance (Dickens & Lonie 2012). White (2016) examines how rap is often a contested activity and documents the recent repression and criminalisation of grime rap in a London borough. Urban rap cultures in disenfranchised communities have been extensively researched (Perkins *et al.* 1996; Compos & Simões 2014). Sjørslev (2011) and Ringsager (2017) highlight a danger of employing rap as a means of political expression. Ringsager (2017: 81) identifies a labelling process where rap music is at times seen as the 'music of marginalised groups of people', which 'raises the question of whether the efforts to include marginalised visible minority youths in rap-based educational programs might have the consequence of actually excluding them'. This ambiguity could mean this 'medium of empowerment' becomes a sign of distinction and low status. Despite these concerns, rap is also seen 'as [a] means to enhance their [young people's] emotional expression and development, and as a way of supporting their participation as active members within their community' (Dickens & Lonie, 2012: 60).

Methodology

The research by O'Connell, O'Sullivan & Byrne (2014, 2017) employed a rap music workshop methodology to engage some children and young people outside the context of focus groups and interviews, which some young people find uninspiring. Creative and participatory methods have been found to facilitate children and young people to express dimensions of their experiences and views that they may find difficult to do through more conventional data gathering approaches (Darbyshire *et al.* 2005, Curtis *et al.* 2004). Following the work of Ennew and Plateau (2004) and Beazley *et al* (2009) the research methodology was based on a rights-based approach. This aligns with Bergold and Thomas' (2012) understanding of participatory research methods as a process '*with* those people whose life-world and meaningful actions are under study'. Accordingly the project methodology focused on research *with*, rather than *about*, children and young people. Lundy's (2007) work was a critical influence on the project, in particular her emphasis on hearing voices in a safe and inclusive space. Furthermore, Lundy and McEvoy (2011) propose that children's participation in research should adhere to the following principles: be voluntary and safe; be creative and child-centred; ensure their views are carefully listened to and acted upon; that feedback is given and that children are engaged in research outcomes.

The project involved 78 children and young people aged 6-19 years who participated in a series of focus groups and photovoice and art activities. Six of these young people, aged 14-16 years participated in a rap music workshop. Over a period of four months in 2013, the researchers sought to establish relationships and build trust with key local actors such as youth workers, training centre managers, school teachers and principals who then facilitated access to children and young people living in the area. This sensitive networking enabled researchers to reach not only the general population of children and young people through the primary and secondary

schools, but also more 'difficult-to-reach' young people in early school-leaving programmes, training workshops and youth projects. These 'difficult-to-reach' children and young people are acknowledged by youth workers in the neighbourhood as being among the most marginalised in the area and the wider city. Hence it was vital to garner their views and their participation added to the richness and depth of the project. Informed consent was sought before children and young people participated in the focus groups. Ethical approval was granted by the University's Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC). The researchers had Garda [Police] Vetting Clearance for working with children prior to beginning the research.

Each focus group centred on a data collection method the researchers devised called 'the Wheel' (see Figure 1). The Wheel proved to be attractive to participants since it demystified the research and created an open-ended but systematic process of data gathering; this was used at the beginning of the rap music workshops.

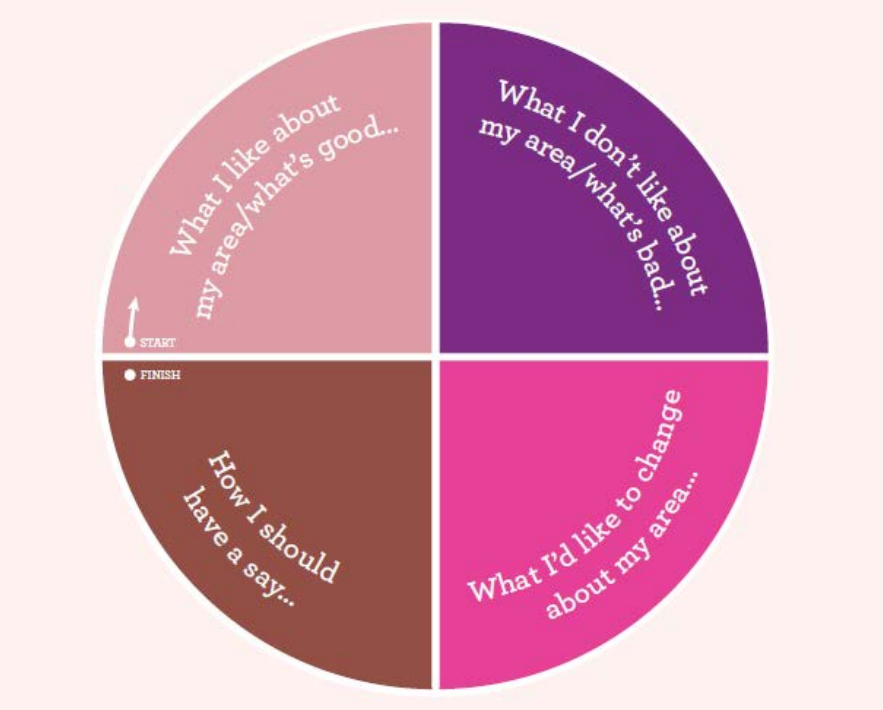


Figure 1: The Wheel Data Collection Method

Hearn and Thomson (2014) have argued that while employing creative methods such as texts, images and artefacts for research purposes may sound simple, there are a range of issues that must be taken into consideration in such approaches. These include ethical issues relating to images and questions of ownership of the final product of the creative process. The researchers sought and received written consent from the Rappers and their parents to use the recordings and quotes from the rap lyrics in the report and outputs, while preserving their anonymity. The young people were given Rap inspired pseudonyms influenced by the lyrical content of their contributions to the song.

They retain full rights to their own lyrics and each of the Rappers was presented with a 'Certificate of Participation' and given a CD copy of the final product.

The Rap Music Workshops Methodology in Practice

In July 2013 six young people aged between 14 and 16 years old (three male and three female) assembled to write and record a rap song in a temporary recording studio in the estate run by a well-known local rap producer. Participants were selected by the rap artist and a local youth worker on the basis of being resident in the area undergoing regeneration and having an interest and some proficiency in rap music. Most of the participants were white; one participant was Black Irish. Two members of the research team actively participated in the workshops, one from beginning to end, and one during the early phase. The youth worker was asked to be present because of her familiarity with the young people as recommended by Curtis *et al* (2004: 171) who state: 'As well as offering encouragement and support to the young people, we found staff able to spot where their difficulties with the research process might lie'. The youth worker had an existing relationship with the Rappers; they all held her in high regard and her continued presence and encouragement was a continuous point of support for the Rappers, especially as at times they were struggling with the size of the task of writing the rap. The producer is a well-known Rapper on the Irish and local Hip Hop scenes. He has a growing reputation as a rap producer and rap artist and has to date released two albums of his own work. He is also a skilled youth worker and had previously worked with all of the Rappers. In their eyes he was cool, someone they look up to, based on his reputation as a Rap artist and also on his ability to work with the children in a professional, respectful and productive manner. The researchers from the University stood in a different position from the youth worker and producer and were unknown to the young people. However, over the course of the three days, going through the process of supporting the Rappers to write their raps, they became much more at ease in the company of the researchers.

Each rapper worked on their own lyrical section that would be collectively combined into a single composition. The themes of 'Neighbourhood' and 'Regeneration' were the only prerequisites. The general atmosphere was most often characterised by enthusiasm, creativity and excitement, particularly as the tasks moved relatively quickly from the writing of lyrics, to the arrangement of the pieces, recording and finally the production mixing. This experience of expression, of 'musical agency' is discussed by Karlsen (2011), whereby young people's musical competence which may not be recognised within the school setting, or even belittled there, is conversely celebrated in the context of the workshop.

Political Participation in the Rap Process

The initial format followed the template established with the wider focus groups beginning with the Wheel activity as outlined above. The results of the wheel activities became a focal point for the three days as they were hung on the walls and the Rappers returned time and time again to their initial reflections to search for newer and sharper ideas for their lyrics. Once the Wheel element of the project was completed, the groups turned to the task of writing the lyrics. At the outset, the researchers made clear to the Rappers the intention to use the raps as a central pillar of a final report. Also, and for many of them more importantly, the Rappers would be invited to perform their finished raps at an event to mark the report's launch. Their school facilitated this

once off performance for an audience of the school community, their parents and government officials.

The general ethos of Rap as a cultural form is as a conduit for political discourse (Neal 2004) and is often orientated toward critique, interpretation and oppositional political messages. The emphasis of the political participation element of the rap music workshops also worked very well as a motivational tool; as the Rappers wrote their lyrics they were all aware they were involved in an act of political participation. The youth worker, producer and the researchers regularly emphasised to the Rappers that the research had been commissioned by government departments and that senior officials at the local City Council would read the report and see them perform their Raps live at the launch event. While the young people participated in the exercise they remained critical of the Council's commitment to act on their voices as the analysis will highlight. Participants were also aware the Raps would be performed in front of members of their own community: parents, neighbours, friends and members of their own age cohort, which was important to the Rappers. Throughout the project the term 'keeping it real' came up quite a bit. It seems to mean being honest, authentic and that the lyrics would have integrity. The Rappers were strongly focused on representing their community in a true light by 'keeping it real', and to present their analysis and critiques of community and regeneration. This resonates with O´Neill's (2012) 'transformative music engagement' whereby through reflection and performance participants can often 'understand something which is already in plain view' (O'Neill 2012).

Tools for Thinking: The Rhyming Dictionary and the Wheel.

Writing lyrics is a difficult and taxing exercise and, as with all people involved in the creative process, motivation sometimes wanes. Some wrote quite quickly, other Rappers sat and discussed the themes with each other, the youth worker, producer and the researchers, and then carefully crafted their lyrics over two or three days. The producer had a backing track continuously playing, encouraging the Rappers to say the lyrics out loud as they wrote them. This meant everyone knew where everyone else was with their lyrics, and though they developed different themes, this continuous communication meant there was a general synthesis in the overarching themes of each individual finished piece. As those ideas had been formed in dialogue, this further aligned each finished piece into broad thematic lines. Here is an example of how continuous dialogue help shape the entire rap music workshop.

Researcher: How's it going Magic]?
Magic : It's not.
Researcher: What are you trying to say now?
Magic 1: I don't know what to say.
Researcher: What about the Wheel [pointing to the Wheel on the wall], you were the one that said Knocknaheeney has a bad name and it's largely untrue.
Magic: Yea, but she is after writing about that.
Youth worker: But you can say it in your own way.
GMC: What do people think about Knocka?

Magic: That it's full of Feens[1].
[Everybody in the room laughs]
GMC: So say something about that.

Over time, Magic came up with the lyric that pokes fun at the representation of local men as Feens, exaggerating the famous local working class accent.

Magic : But what do ya see when you look at me,
A young teen or a feen from Knocknaheeny?

One of the most useful pieces of equipment during the project was The Rhyming Dictionary, an application the producer downloaded onto an Apple ipad. It enabled the Rappers to enter a word into the programme and it would respond with a comprehensive list of words that rhymed with it. This opened up new linguistic opportunities for the Rappers. As the Rappers had not previously encountered many of those words they actively sought the help of the youth worker, producer and the researchers to define the words. Even if the Rappers did not use any of these new words in their raps, discussing the meaning of previously unknown words developed deeper levels of concentration and opened up further opportunities for reflection.

Analysis of The Rap: 'Deal With It'.

The rap 'Deal With It' is a succinct and engaging description of life in the neighbourhood, chronicling the many challenges the young people encounter in their day-to-day experiences, but more so, it offers a deep level of critical reflection and analysis, with a strong imaginative and aesthetic appeal. Like with all other groups who participated in the research, the project began with the Wheel activity. See Figure 2 below for the contents of the Wheel activity from the Rappers in tabular form.

[1] Feen is a term used in the local idiom for boys or men. It has a somewhat mysterious etymology; it may come from the Traveller Language Cant where man translates as Feen (See http://www.travellersrest.org/sheltaenglishnocant990418.htm).

What I like about my area	What I don't like about my area	What I'd like to change about my area	What regeneration should do
Amenities and Environment	**Safety and anti-social behaviour**	**Personal perceptions and relationships**	**Commercial and Retail**
Linkpoint [youth centre]	Garda move you on from hanging around	Horses	Hire young people
Youth Centre	Drug dealing	Halting site - traveller associated with bad people.	Cinema
Fresh air	Some people - junkies, killings, alcohol	Some Traveller want trouble/fights but most ordinary	Penneys [clothes shop - Primark]
Cannot get flooded	Robbed car	Perception - bad name. Cause the truth is it not that bad	More jobs in regen building, shopping centre, economic development
Personal	Stabbings	**Amenities and Environment**	**Amenities and Environment**
Family	Petrol bombs	Luas or tram	Clean it up
Friends	Bonna night - 18 up adults causing trouble, lots of fights, people getting drunk, bus of gardai [police], 14 arrested	Good bus link	Education - put a college up here
Church - priest	**Amenities and Environment**	Connect Knocka to city centre	**Personal perceptions and relationships**
Recreation and Sports	Litter	Wifi	Certain people
Castleview [sports club]	Boarded up houses		Make Knocka a better place
Commercial and Retail	No houses		
SuperValu [supermarket]	Empty spaces		
	Personal perceptions and relationships		
	Knocka has a bad name, it's annoying - over everything has happened (over exaggerated)		

Figure 2: Results from Wheel for Rap B

The Rap 'Deal With It' centres around twelve key themes: the environment; political responsibility; having political influence; fear, anti-social behaviour, crime; drinking and drugs; personal relationships; stigma; public services; sports and recreation; inequality; regeneration; and a misdiagnosis of problematic issues by authorities.

Deal With It[2]

Verse 1 by Magic
The creation of this regeneration is making
A new Knocka nation. We're patiently waiting
For the restoration of our community
We can change what others have to say and have to see.
But what do ya see when you look at me
A young teen or a feen from Knocknaheeny?
Our place it's known as a disgrace
People haven't took the time to see our real face.
As youths we need to be seen and heard
Our questions we need to be answered and not ignored.
So what you gonna to improve Knocknaheeny?
Have you a magic wand or are you just a genie?

Verse 2 by The Future
We're the future of Cork, the new generation
Our voices lost in the talk of regeneration.
We wanna be heard and we wanna be known
As the children who made a difference on our home.
Knocknaheeny, the place I was born and raised
Is gonna be improved in a new and better way.
Well that's what they say, at least, they are trying to change
our streets
So I express what I feel, I put these lyrics on this beat.
When you look at Cork City's youths what do you see?
The truth or what you can't understand and see.
The real faces that make up our community
But livin up here you have to make opportunities.

Chorus by Dealz
Listen to what we have to say
We're the future we're here to stay.
So deal with it,
Just deal with it.
Listen to what we have to say
We're the future we're here to stay.
So deal with it,
Just deal with it.

Verse 3 by Rebel
The truth's harsh, like biting a lemon its bitter
But the truth is the place is destroyed in litter.
Trying to avoid broken bottles in front of you
Jumping around the place like it's Just Dance 2.
And all the builders up knocking all the houses

Chorus by Dealz
Listen to what we have to say
We're the future, we're here to stay.
So deal with it,
Just deal with it.
Listen to what we have to say
We're the future, we're here to stay.
So deal with it,
Just deal with it.

Bridge 1 by Rebel
C in Cork is for culture.
O in Cork is for the opportunities.
R in Cork is for Rebels that are red.
K is for Knocka where I rest my head.
C in Cork is for culture.
O in Cork is for the opportunities.
R in Cork is for Rebels that are red.
K is for Knocka where I rest my head.

Verse 4 by Reputations and Masterplan
Reputations: Think of all the families being separated
Is that what you mean when we're regenerated?
Masterplan: How would you feel if you were kicked out of home?
Moving somewhere else where you feel all alone.
Reputations: We know Knocka has a bad reputation
But there is no need for a mass evacuation.
Masterplan: Shades [police] moves us on when were only hanging around.
People stealing, stabbing, dealing, that's what's really going down.
Reputations: Stop stopping Bonna [Bonfire] night it's only our tradition.
Why bother saying it, ye're not going to listen.
Masterplan: Horses in estates they're a state, they're neglected.
But others are ok, leave 'em alone just accept it.
Reputations: We know that there's issues that need to be dealt with.
But your masterplan never asked us SHHHH!
Masterplan: It doesn't matter though about what we think.
Why's it always the youth are the missing link?

Bridge 2 by Magic
Make Knocka a better place.
For you and for me and the entire Knocka-race.

[2] The recorded version of the Rap is available on http://soundcloud.com/gmcworkshops/sets/knocknaheeny-regeneration-ucc/. This process was facilitated and recorded at the Kabin Studio in Knocknaheeny by Garry McCarthy (GMCBeats Workshops). The Kabin Studio is a youth music space supported by Music Generation Cork City.

And all the small maddies are out jocking the horses.
My mother's out the back and she's trying to get a tan
And my brother's running down the road after the whippy van!
And all the boys with their shorts and their t-shirts
And all the girls wearing their belly tops and skirts.
When we're playing soccer in the park and it's dark
And it's full of needles. Like getting bitten by a shark.
And all the people going out robbing cars,
They're drink and driving, they're crashing, they can see the stars.
This is where I'm from I keep real with it.
I'm Knocknaheeny born just deal with it.

Bridge 3 by Magic
The things you say should be gone,
We think they're grand, but you got it all wrong.
So deal with it,
Deal with it
Just deal with it,
Deal with it.
The things you say should be gone,
We think they're grand, but you got it all wrong.
So deal with it,
Deal with it,
Just deal with it,
Deal with it.

Magic 's lyrics are clever and satirical. It is humour, but humour with serious intent. He describes his locality as 'the new Knocka[3] nation', expressing a deep sense of pride in the area, making specific reference to the unique identity of place. Directly addressing the promise of regeneration he sets up the premise of his critique by highlighting the political responsibility of authority holders and decision makers. He cites the '*restoration'* of the community, but acknowledges the on-going project is disrupting community life and that needs to be fixed. Next he addresses the issue of estate reputation and the on-going issue of stigma. During the Wheel Activity Magic raised this very point, and subsequently turned it into the lyrical form. Playing with perception he ask the listener/audience of senior civil servants, planners and council officials: '*What do you see when you look at me, a young teen or a Feen from Knocknaheeny'?* In the final recorded version he exaggerates the local accent to represent the stigma of being low status, the low status he recognises is attributed to him and his community by the rest of the city/society. These insights resonate with Goffman's (1963) classical formulation of social stigma and discrimination. Goffman describes the stigmatised subject feel shame because of poverty. "You are not worth it, you don't work" (1963: 37.) Magic rejects a 21st century reiteration of that age-old stigma and labelling, saying: '*People haven't took the time to see our real face'*. The final couplet returns to the topic of political responsibility and the lack of consultation. When writing the lyrics he made clear he wanted to ask decision makers 'how are you going to improve Knocknaheeny when you haven't even asked us what we think?' which became: '*Have you a magic wand or are you just a genie?'*

The Future's verse develops six themes: political participation, personal relationships, political responsibility, his hope for regeneration, neighbourhood stigma and public services/education. He begins with a call for participation for children and young people: *'We're the future of Cork'*, but '*Our Voices lost in the talk of regeneration'*. Knocknaheeny is his place, where he is from; he is embedded in the community, tied and made by these personal relationships. The Future has an extremely accomplished rapping style, the rhythm of his lyrics, at times, runs at an alternative beat to the 4/4 time signature on the track. This is a sophisticated rapping style because as an audience it sounds at first as if he has lost his way, but then to realise he planned the stumbling style to match the meaning of confusion he wants to elucidate. This parallels with the meaning of those lyrics because

[3] Knocknaheeny is widely referred to as 'Knocka' across Cork city, but this is not generally used as a disparaging term.

he says: '*Well that's what they say, at least, they are trying to change our streets. So I express what I feel, I put these lyrics on this beat'*. This is a clever approach because he was attempting to communicate the sense of hesitancy and confusion about the entire regeneration project in the area: there is real confusion, and in the rap he actually sounds confused. In the next theme, like some of the other rappers in this group, he addresses neighbourhood stigma and the misrecognition the community, especially regarding the young: *'When you look at Cork City's youths what do you see?'* He argues that Knocknaheeny youth are no different from young people in other parts of the city, *'The truth or what you can't understand and see. The real faces that make up our community'*. However, in his view, there is a lack of education programmes and employment opportunities in Knocknaheeny and young people have to make their own way: '*But livin up here you have to make opportunities'*.

Rebel, the youngest member of the group, wrote the longest verse and one entire bridge on his own. Largely working independently from the group, his verse focuses on six themes: political participation, the environment, fear, regeneration, stigma, and personal relationships. The verse begins by drawing attention to the lack of consultation in the area, arguing that they, as residents, are best placed to identify the flaws in the area: '*the truth's harsh'*, '*deal with it'*. Moving between literal description and metaphor he describes how environmental degradation is affecting their everyday lives. His next section is an ode to community, and one feels the positive experience of living in a tightly knit neighbourhood that is often joyful. The city was experiencing a unusual heat wave at the time and many outdoor activities were celebrated including: 'jocking the horses'- which means riding horses in the estate, usually other people's horses and often without permission; the 'whippy van' – which refers to the ice-cream sellers who sell from the back of vans; and 'maddies'- which refer to mad people, which in a colloquial sense means people who have a fun attitude to life rather than someone experiencing a mental illness. Rebel's descriptions move from the fun of community life to the real dangers associated with criminality, drugs and environmental degradation: *'When we're playing soccer in the park and it's dark, And it's full of needles. Like getting bitten by a shark'*. He also describes their fears about criminality, robbing cars, dangerous driving, etc. This is Rebel's truthful and honest description of Knocknaheeny but he refuses to be stigmatised by it: *'This is where I'm from I keep real with it. I'm Knocknaheeny born just deal with it'*.

The final verse written by Reputations and Masterplan is the most critical of both regeneration and the authorities working in their neighbourhood. They are good friends and they wrote and rapped their section together. Their rap develops five themes: a critique of regeneration, political responsibility, neighbourhood stigma, critique of authorities, and political consultation. They also have an accomplished rapping style and once in the verse their lines overlap, transforming the sound 'SHHHH' and the word 'it' to make the sound: 'shit'. Both have had a personal involvement with the regeneration process, with family and friends having been moved out of the area to new neighbourhoods. This caused them both some distress and they address this theme of families being separated in the first line of the lyric. Addressing policy makers directly they ask: *'How would you feel if you were kicked out of home? Moving somewhere else where you feel all alone'*. Then, linking the themes of neighbourhood stigma and the policy of regeneration they state: *'We know Knocka has a bad reputation, But there is no need for a mass evacuation'*.

They then develop the theme of misrecognition stating that the Gardaí (police) and Council are mistaken in determining that bonfire night and horses are problematic practices. They argue that

while some people do it poorly or disruptively, it is wrong to tar everyone with the same brush. *'Shades [police] moves us on when were only hanging around. People stealing, stabbing, dealing, that's what's really going down'*. They were particularly annoyed the police 'wasted time' on them when there were crimes being committed elsewhere. Finally, they strongly critique the lack of consultation with regeneration: *'We know that there's issues that need to be dealt with. But your masterplan never asked us SHHHH! IT doesn't matter though about what we think. Why's it always the youth are the missing link?'* This is a powerful sentiment; they feel they are being ignored, that what they think doesn't actually matter; that they are excluded.

The chorus by Dealz makes a direct appeal to participate in the consultation processes. She highlights their role as the future generation, those who will most likely remain in the neighbourhood and thus they should be recognised and though they may be young they have valuable insights.

Listen to what we have to say,
We're the future we're here to stay.
So deal with it,
Just deal with it.

The Rap also includes three distinct bridges. These transitional sections reemphasise themes developed elsewhere in the verses. Bridge 1: '*C in Cork is for culture. O in Cork is for the opportunities. R in Cork is for Rebels that are red. K is for Knocka where I rest my head.*' Written and performed by Rebel he reiterates their dual localised identities as 'included' citizens of Cork City who are also the 'excluded' young people of Knocknaheeny. O is for the opportunities that don't seem to be distributed evenly across the city.

Bridge 2, written and performed by Magic , offers a striking change of direction, a single voice foregrounded by a silent backdrop: '*Make Knocka a better place. For you and for me and the entire Knocka-race.'* Incorporating the melody and part of the lyrics of the Michael Jackson song, 'Heal the World', Magic satirises that song's sentimentality. But there is a second level of satire, where he reinforces the message about regeneration being top down and lacking consultation. In his performance of this section, Magic beseeches the authorities to 'help us'.

Bridge 3, integrated with the chorus refrain, was written collectively by the group and performed by Magic . It reiterates one of the key themes of the entire rap, the misrecognition of positive aspects of community life (e.g. horses, bonfire night, hanging around on the street, etc.) as problematic behaviours. '*The things you say should be gone, we think they're grand, but you got it all wrong.*' This critique drives home their point about the importance of consultation and inclusion.

Conclusion

Children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds face multiple forms of exclusion based on their age, socio-economic status, stigmatisation of their areas and perceived antagonistic relations with service providers and some institutions. Through rap it has been demonstrated that young people have opinions on how problems can be defined and responded to. In this research,

young people got to express themselves in a creative and original manner and it was the first time their voices were heard on the regeneration of their housing estate. The young people highlight the structural context in which they find themselves, the lack of local opportunities, being labelled as coming from a broken community, and the lack of consultation by the state. In terms of policy impact, the research influenced the Irish government's National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making (2015-2020: 40) which is guided by Article 12 of the UNCRC. This strategy states as a result of the research that 'Local Authorities will integrate local children and young people's participation into Housing Regeneration Programmes funded under the National Regeneration Programme.' However, further research is required to establish whether local policy-makers and service providers have implemented this objective.

As evidenced by the analysis presented in this article, rap music workshops can be an effective method to elicit the views and opinions of young people on how the problems they experience can be addressed, in a way that is culturally and age appropriate. The use of rap music workshops echoes Hearn and Thomson's (2014) observation that children and young people use various forms of media to keep connections with their friends, families and community and for making sense of their lives and experiences. Rap also helps address the concern that research about children and young people is generally conducted from adult perspectives and seeks to redress this imbalance with the essence of the method based on the autonomy and agency of the child (Bragg, 2007, Thomson, 2011 cited in Hearn and Thomson 2014). The use of rap music workshops and other creative approaches can allow young people to express themselves in spaces where they are comfortable, reveal opinions which may not necessarily be articulated through other methods, and allows them to reflect their everyday life experiences and identity. It has potential for application in other areas of policy which affect young people's lives and while participation in this particular project set prerequisites, it would be worthwhile widening the participation net to include young people with no previous rap experience.

The lyrics of the rap challenge regeneration narratives that depict it as a positive public policy intervention. Regeneration interventions entail numerous impacts on communities. The dispersal of established communities and loss of social networks, the reinforcing of stigma and labelling, and the lack of communication and participation in the process leaves communities feeling that regeneration is an oppressive regime and a top down process. While the need to address poor housing and environmental conditions is often self-evident, state-driven interventions don't necessarily lead to better outcomes for poor communities without wider structural and welfare reform and a reconfiguration of power asymmetries (Hancock and Mooney, 2013). Using rap to hear the voices of children and young people reveals a critical perspective of regeneration and its consequences for their community. Young people are not short of ideas on their area and how they can get involved and have a say on matters that affect them. This article has shown how by using innovative research methods young people and researchers can work together to influence policy and challenge inequalities.

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