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# Notorious Places: Image, Reputation, Stigma. The Role of Newspapers in Area Reputations for Social Housing Estates

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**ABSTRACT** *This paper reviews work in several disciplines to distinguish between image, reputation and stigma. It also shows that there has been little research on the process by which area reputations are established and sustained through transmission processes. This paper reports on research into the portrayal of two social housing estates in the printed media over an extended period of time (14 years). It was found that negative and mixed coverage of the estates dominated, with the amount of positive coverage being very small. By examining the way in which dominant themes were used by newspapers in respect of each estate, questions are raised about the mode of operation of the press and the communities' collective right to challenge this. By identifying the way regeneration stories are covered and the nature of the content of positive stories, lessons are drawn for programmes of area transformation. The need for social regeneration activities is identified as an important ingredient for changing deprived-area reputations.*

**KEY WORDS:** Area reputation, stigma, image, newspapers, regeneration

## Introduction

All places have identities, but some places also have reputations. In an ongoing study of deprived communities in Glasgow, two key findings were striking (see GoWell, 2010). First, that both in inner-city mass housing estates and in peripheral estates in the city, there is a high recognition of the existence of negative area reputations: between 60 and 70 per cent of residents in these areas identified that their neighbourhoods had a poor external reputation, i.e. they agreed with the statement: 'Many people in Glasgow think this neighbourhood has a bad reputation'—this is akin to what has been called the 'self-reflecting image', the image that residents believe is held by outsiders (Skifter-Andersen, 2008). Research has indicated that residents' assessments of the reputations of their neighbourhoods (the so-called 'internal image') are typically more positive than that held

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by outsiders (the so-called 'external image') (Permentier *et al.*, 2008). Second, it was found that only a relatively small number of residents in the inner city estates, *c.* 35 per cent, derived status-related psychosocial benefits from where they lived, *i.e.* they agreed with the statement 'Living in this area makes me feel I'm doing well in life', and although more did so in the peripheral estates (60 per cent), this was also still less than in other more popular social housing areas (over 70 per cent).

This high awareness of area reputations and of the relative social status of areas among residents prompted us to try to find out more about the reality and potential source of those reputations. In this, we decided to focus on the role of the local media since newspaper reports had been identified as a source of negative reputations in other recent studies of the images of social housing estates in UK cities (*e.g.* Flint *et al.*, 2007; Robertson *et al.*, 2008), though social class distinctions between housing developments were also identified as a major influence on enduring images and attitudes in the case of longer-standing communities (Robertson *et al.*, 2010). In our case, the estates in question had only been in existence for 40 years before being declared in need of regeneration in 2005, so we wished to see how they had been portrayed in the media before and after that date. But before describing our study, we need to consider what we mean by reputation, alongside other key concepts allied to it such as image and stigma.

### **Image, Reputation and Stigma**

There is a need to develop some conceptual distinctions. Our review of reputation studies in the housing and urban research fields (see below) revealed that many studies do not provide a theoretical definition of the key phenomenon of interest, and make no attempt to distinguish reputation from other key terms such as image and stigma. Often reputation and stigma are used as interchangeable terms, when in fact they denote different phenomena. Moreover, there is little acknowledgement of research in other fields where reputation and stigma have been defined and investigated; thus, we wished to see what could be learned from these other disciplines.

Outside housing and urban studies, and in earlier times, 'image' and 'reputation' were seen as positive qualities, with much of the academic work on these issues appearing in business and management studies, economics and more recently computing science. In the early days (1950s and 1960s) of public relations and management studies, 'corporate image' was viewed as something positive that firms projected into the market place. Much later, cities were said to be doing similar things, projecting positive images of themselves, especially through cultural and visual means (*e.g.* Garcia, 2005; Henry & Paramio-Salcines, 1999; Richards & Wilson, 2004), and using branding and marketing (Paddison, 1993). In due course, business and management studies realised that 'image' could be used to manipulate consumers, and the focus shifted after the 1970s to the construction of corporate reputations (Rindova, 1997), and eventually also to the establishment of 'reputation goods' where consumer choices were firmly made on the basis of expectations of product quality (Rogerson, 1983; Shapiro, 1982, 1983), and on the basis of a judgement about the reputation of the good among other consumers (Satterthwaite, 1979).

The fact that reputation can have positive returns was explored by economists using game theory (GT) in the 1970s and 1980s. In this, 'informed' players repeat actions or behaviours that suit others so as to acquire a reputation and increase their long-run returns as the 'uninformed' players used the history of past game outcomes to choose to cooperate

with the ‘informed’ players. The latter ‘commitment types’ then acquired the benefits of ‘reputation effects’ as the ‘uninformed’ players grew to trust the ‘informed’ players to benefit them, increasing the worth of the ‘informed’ players (Dellarocas, 2005; Mui *et al.*, 2002); alternative scenarios where the pay-off from reputation does not occur have been proposed (Ely & Valimaki, 2003). However, this notion of long-run players or ‘commitment types’ who repeatedly play the same action for higher returns is one we shall return to, as it may apply to newspapers.

The application of concepts of reputation to market transactions has taken another step forward since the 1990s as a result of online marketplaces, so that one of the largest literatures we found on reputation was (surprisingly to us) that on distributed artificial intelligence (DAI) systems in computing science (Sabater-Mir, 2006). In online market places [a type of multi-agent system (MAS)], self-interested agents with limited information, limited capabilities, and most-importantly, without face-to-face contact, interact for mutual benefit. In order to do so, ratings systems are adopted to create and communicate ‘social reputations’ as a means of trust-enforcement and self-regulation (Hahn *et al.*, 2007). By controlling the information exchanged within on-line reputational mechanisms, mediators ‘promote trust and cooperation’, ‘facilitate transactions among strangers’ and ‘engineer desirable social outcomes’ (Dellarocas, 2004, p. 2). One interesting aspect of reputations in GT and MAS is that the subject of the reputation has some (even a lot) of influence (if not control) over the quality of their reputation, which they expect to benefit from—even though they are not directly responsible for the assessments of themselves by others—but this is not usually the case with neighbourhood reputations.

Within the world of DAI, an important distinction has been made between ‘image’ and ‘reputation’. Image is defined as a person’s own evaluative belief about an object, whereas reputation is a *meta-belief*, namely a belief about other people’s beliefs (Conte & Paolucci, 2002). Thus, a number of different individuals can hold the same belief about an object, but this is a ‘shared image’ not a reputation (Sabater *et al.*, 2006). As a meta-belief, reputation is an evaluative belief held by an individual that s/he believes an unidentified majority to hold true about an object, i.e. the person believes that most people would hold or agree with a certain opinion, without attributing it to a particular group, or necessarily believing it to be truthful or accurate him/herself. Sabater *et al.* point out that a belief can spread through a population and become a reputation without a majority believing it to be deserved: ‘meta-beliefs can spread without first-level beliefs spreading’ (2006, p. 3). A reputation exists, then, when a certain number of people believe it to exist and consistently state that belief to others in a form of ‘shared voice’, i.e. reputation is a transmission process by which a belief is spread (see Pinyol *et al.*, 2007). Thus, in the case of reputation, there is no personal commitment on the part of the speaker to subscribe to the view expressed, no responsibility regarding the source of the information, and no specific referent or instances cited.

This process perspective becomes even more important for our purposes when reputation is considered as a form of symbolic capital, i.e. an attribute or resource that confers power, status and distinction to the agent, derived from other forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1984; Flint & Rowlands, 2003; Hahn *et al.*, 2007). We then need to ask how the ‘symbolic transformation of individual data and opinions into socially accepted knowledge’ (Hahn *et al.*, 2007, p. 3) occurs. Mui *et al.* (2002) identify two sources of information about reputation, namely direct experiences and observations of the object in question and indirect or second-hand evidence not derived directly from the object itself.

Hahn *et al.* (2007, p. 4) go on to argue that symbolic capital is conferred by agents larger than individuals, institutional actors that are well reputed and able to spread their views publicly, citing journalists as a prime example.

Much of the recent work on stigma lies in the public health field since stigma can add to the burden of illness and affect access to treatment and control of diseases (Weiss *et al.*, 2006), most notably in relation to HIV/AIDS in recent decades (Nyblade, 2006). As Wassenberg (2004) noted, stigma is wholly negative, whereas image and reputation can be positive or negative. Interpretations of stigma in the health field build upon Goffman's early work on the issue in sociology wherein social disqualification—being 'disqualified from full social acceptance' (1963, p. 9)—occurs as a result of a 'spoiled identity'. Weiss *et al.* (2006) updated Goffman's definitions (concerned with 'physical abominations', 'tribal identities' and 'blemishes of character'), and, paraphrasing their definition, we can understand that stigma is a social process by which a person or group experiences, perceives or anticipates an adverse social judgement that results in discrimination, exclusion, rejection, blame or devaluation as a result of 'an enduring feature of identity' (p. 280). There is a link here to Lynch's (1960) idea of 'imageability' in the city, whereby physical elements and appearance are key components of people's experience of urban space. In this, physical differentiation is considered a good thing. However, saying that 'neighbourhoods need an identity of their own' (Wassenberg, 2004, p. 226) can be a double-edged sword depending on how that visual distinction is socially evaluated.

Going back to Goffman's interpretation, stigma is concerned with social interactions and actions taken on the basis of attitudes that stem from both symbolic and/or physical attributes of the subject. The symbolic element is important here, for it has been argued that research and interventions on health-related stigma have over-emphasised its individual, emotional and psychological dimensions while underplaying its structural roots in broader patterns of power and its role in legitimising social inequality in society (Parker & Aggleton, 2003). This realisation has several consequences for our understanding. First, stigma can be the result of the actions of groups of people, not only of individuals. Second, stigma is often seen as something within the individual victim, rather than as something attached to that person by others (Link & Phelan, 2001). Lastly, as explained by Parker & Aggleton (2003), stigma is form of symbolic violence and hegemony, as a result of which 'those who are stigmatised and discriminated against in society... often accept and even internalise the stigma that they are subjected to', and because of this, 'the ability to resist the forces that discriminate against them is limited' (p. 18).

To clarify the distinction, whereas reputation is a transmission process that can result in positive or negative beliefs, stigma is a social interactive process with wholly negative effects. While the person/subject can help create their own reputation, or seek to positively change it, the subject is entirely the victim of stigma, with positive circumstances dependent on wider socio-cultural change, since the enduring feature or attribute underlying the stigma is much harder to change (e.g. being a refugee; being disabled; living in a high-rise estate). The health research is also interesting for its consideration of how stigma can stem from fear of the risk of infectious disease (even when infection is no longer likely); in the case of other social stigma, there may equally be an underlying fear of social contagion (e.g. living near someone who is drug dependent).

### Reputation Studies in Recent Neighbourhoods Research

Research on the factors which influence neighbourhood reputation (i.e. residents' views of how others assess their area) reflects both the structural and the 'spoiled identity' interpretations of stigma. In their study of neighbourhoods in Utrecht, Permentier *et al.* (2011) conclude that ethnic composition and average income are the strongest influences on 'perceived reputation' and that this 'reflects the stratification process in society as a whole' (p. 993). This concurs with Skifter-Andersen's (1999) study of 500 Danish estates, where the share of ethnic minorities in an area was also among the most important factors in explaining poor reputation. Conversely, physical identifiers have also been found to be influential on perceived reputation. Permentier *et al.* (2011) found that distance to the city centre was negatively related to perceived neighbourhood reputation (i.e. poorer reputation the further away the area is), and in a subsequent study of 12 Danish neighbourhoods, Skifter-Andersen (2008) found that a view that the buildings, streets and squares in the neighbourhood were ugly was associated with a poor perceived area reputation.

Both the studies in the Netherlands and Denmark found that residents' concerns about crime, safety and anti-social behaviour in their area were then reflected in a perceived negative reputation. A recent study in Adelaide suggested that influence could run in the other direction, namely that a pre-existing perceived reputation of an area influenced how residents described and explained disorder in their area. In an area with a positive reputation, disorder was attributed to a small group of people, and in an area with a negative reputation, disorder was located in particular parts of the estate (Osborne *et al.*, 2011).

There has also been research on responses to negative neighbourhood reputations, most of which has investigated whether the perceived reputation influences the decision to move. Using Hirschman's model for responses to service dissatisfaction, Permentier *et al.* (2007) argue that residential mobility—'the exit option'—is the most 'clear-cut' response to a negative neighbourhood reputation because of the negative effects on a person's status, self-image and well-being (Permentier *et al.*, 2009). Several studies (e.g. Permentier *et al.*, 2009; Tsafiti & Cohen, 2003) have shown a relationship between perceived neighbourhood (or town) reputation and intention to move, though this is moderated by place attachment—especially having family living nearby. Indeed, in his study of 12 Danish estates, Skifter-Andersen (2008) reported that the perception of a poor area reputation was the most important influence on plans to move away. Such mobility can form part of a 'spiral of decline', wherein higher turnover leads to dwelling vacancies and a further decline in a neighbourhood's reputation (Prak & Priemus, 1986). High turnover, and especially selective migration, can be both a signal of, and a mechanism for, low attractiveness and a bad reputation (Andersson & Brama, 2004).

However, not everyone is in a position to move. Short of relocation, there are other forms of social withdrawal which constitute means of disassociation from the neighbourhood and its negative reputation (Brodsky, 1996; Wacquant, 1993), as well as distancing via social differentiation within the area itself (Hastings, 2004; Palmer *et al.*, 2004). Such strategies were illustrated in a recent Australian study, where residents made micro-distinctions on the basis of location within an estate, length of residence, housing tenure and age group in order to 'locate' the source of a bad reputation elsewhere, referred to as 'drawing geographic and moral boundaries' (Osborne *et al.*, 2011, p. 253). There is



also evidence that in response to what may be considered an undeserved negative reputation, residents may participate to fight back against reputation and stigma (Mazanti & Ploger, 2003). Indeed, Permentier *et al.* (2007) argue that ‘voice’ deserves more attention as a response and should be studied alongside ‘exit’, since participation constitutes an investment in the area that may lower the probability of moving. This ‘voice’ approach has been taken further in the case of the WIMBY! (Welcome in My Back Yard) initiative in the modernist, medium-to-high-rise, Hoogvliet district of Rotterdam. Here, since 2000, social marketing and cultural projects have been used to try to change both the negative image of this New Town and the mentality and ‘inferiority complex’ of the residents by highlighting the positive physical and social qualities, and ‘unexpected urban potentialities’ of an area that had ‘become known as a ghetto’ (Provoost, 2004).

Two important aspects of neighbourhood reputations that rarely feature in existing research are, firstly, the content or meaning of reputations (what are they about?), and, secondly, the process by which they are created and sustained (how are they made?). Studies of neighbourhood characteristics associated with a perceived negative external reputation among residents (e.g. Permentier *et al.*, 2008) are not the same thing, since this only tells us what influences residents’ perceptions, not how beliefs are formed and transmitted, and what the actual nature of those external beliefs is.

One partial exception is the study of neighbourhood reputations in a Swedish municipality by Kullberg & Timpka (2010). On the basis of their quantitative and qualitative findings, they proposed two relevant mechanisms. First, they found a strong association between area reputation and social trust, and suggested that in areas with a poor reputation, there could be a vicious circle so that ‘low reciprocity . . . seemed to give rise to low trust and low social interaction’ (p. 600). A consequence of this was that the residents who saw a contradiction between their own positive experience of the area and its negative reputation ‘had no means available to improve the reputation’ (p. 601). Their argument is that social ties are impaired by a negative reputation and associated perceptions, and this situation then persists over time. Second, and in contrast, residents in areas with a favourable reputation actually put in a collective ‘reputation effort’ to create and sustain that belief, i.e. they talked up their area, referring to its reputation often, and in so doing developed social trust and shared norms. In a sense, the creation of a positive area reputation, through communication, formed part of a virtuous circle that generated a sense of community.

This social mechanism whereby residents may, or may not, be able to contribute to the creation of their area’s reputation is not the only means of reputation formation. The Swedish study also recognised that ‘the local newspaper played a key role in the reputation process. Local news and events were often reported in a stereotype fashion, leading to creation of typecast perceptions’ (p. 603). This echoes a much earlier finding by Damer (1992) that the local press was one of several external actors which perpetuated myths about certain estates (others being housing officers, social workers and the police). In an institutional analysis of the maintenance of ‘estate images’ in three places, Hastings (2004) also highlighted the role of the media and estate agents, concluding that ‘the interest of the commercial media in perpetuating the problem reputations of . . . estates is . . . clear cut’ (p. 252). Journalists were of the view that bad news stories sold papers more so than good news stories and that ‘stigmatised estates were obvious places to look for bad news stories’ (p. 253), and were selective in the stories they told.

## **Research Aims and Objectives**

With regard to the reputations of the social housing estates we are studying, we are interested in the relatively neglected issues of meaning and process. The aim of this research is to investigate whether and how the printed media (newspapers) may play a role in creating and sustaining a negative image and reputation for particular ‘notorious’ estates. If they do this, then we also wish to find out on what basis, and through what processes, newspapers produce this effect. In this research, we do not investigate how residents or other stakeholders make use of newspaper reports on the estates. Nor do we study the processes through which such reports operate to influence the development of public perceptions of the estates.

### *Research Questions*

The specific questions we address in the empirical analysis of media content of two inner-city mass housing estates in Glasgow (see below) are as follows:

- What is the volume and balance of newspaper coverage of the two estates over time?
- Are there differences between newspapers in their treatment of the estates?
- What is the subject matter of stories of different complexions, i.e. what is the content of positive, negative or other stories? Has coverage been shaped by specific events?
- Are there differences in the way the two estates are treated? If so, is this due to differences in the nature of two estates or due to other factors?

Having conducted the analysis, we then wished to use the findings to reflect on two things. First, what do they tell us about how the printed media operate in producing coverage of social housing estates. Second, are there any lessons to be learnt for programmes and practitioners involved in trying to transform the fortunes of such estates through regeneration.

## **Methods**

### *Study Estates*

The study areas are both mass housing estates located two miles apart in the north of Glasgow, namely Sighthill and Red Road. They were both 1960s developments built as part of ‘the most concentrated multi-storey building drive experienced by any British city’, wherein a ‘haphazard . . . forest of high blocks’ was built, utilising as many gap-sites and open spaces in the city as possible and ensuring ‘the maximum yield from any site’ (Horsey, 1990, pp. 45–57). Following housing stock transfer in 2003 (Kearns & Lawson, 2008), the two estates were formally identified in 2006 as two of eight estates in a joint regeneration programme between the social landlord and the city council to run over the next 10–15 years (Glasgow City Council, 2007; Glasgow Housing Association, 2006). At that time, Sighthill had a population of around 6100 people and Red Road 3700.

### *Newspapers and Articles Examined*

We examined the content of Glasgow-based newspapers over the period January 1998 to August 2011<sup>1</sup>; this was the earliest date for which Glasgow newspaper articles were



digitised and allowed us to cover a reasonable period both before and after the advent of regeneration. The newspapers were as follows: *The Herald* and *Sunday Herald*, a broadsheet national newspaper; *The Daily Record* and *Sunday Mail*, a national morning tabloid newspaper and *The Evening Times*, a Glasgow afternoon/evening tabloid. Three online media databases were used to identify articles in order to minimise the chances that we would miss an article. The databases were as follows: Newsbank's 'Access World News': <http://www.infoweb.newbank.com>; the Nexis UK online archive: <http://www.lexisnexis.com/uk/nexis>; and the archive of the Newsquest Media Group, which owns *The Herald* and *Evening Times*: <http://www.pqasb.pqarchiver.com/smgpubs/advanced.html>. All articles selected through a search using the names of the estates were initially examined, and any deemed not to be about the estates in question were removed: these were mainly articles about an Edinburgh estate also called Sighthill; and articles about the movie *Red Road*, where no mention of the estate where it was set was made.

### *Assessment of Content*

Articles were categorised according to the image they conveyed of the estate in question to a reader with little or no prior knowledge of the estate, as positive, negative, mixed or neutral (where the estate was mentioned or discussed but with no evaluative image of the estate conveyed). These categorisations were made on the basis of factors such as the volume of text conveying a particular image; the exact wording of that text; the tone or seriousness of the article; the wider context within which the estate was discussed and the positioning of the discussion of the estate within the whole article.

After discussion of the meanings of the four categorisations among the researchers, a single researcher categorised the articles. A random sample of the articles (8 per cent of Sighthill's and 6 per cent of Red Road's) were then categorised by a second researcher to ensure validity, with a discrepancy rate of 23 per cent in the case of Sighthill and 15 per cent in the case of Red Road (which was tackled second). Our inter-rater reliability (IRR) was higher than reported in previous research (McLaren *et al.* (2005) reported 64 per cent IRR). The discrepancies mostly related to articles that had been categorised as 'mixed'. In the case of Sighthill, all articles categorised as 'mixed' were then re-examined by the second researcher, resulting in 25 articles being re-categorised into another category. In the case of Red Road, all articles on five specific themes were re-examined, resulting in 14 articles being re-categorised.

In the examination of articles about Red Road, we refined our method further by distinguishing between *direct* and *indirect* articles about the estate so that we could compare the balance of coverage between the two and examine the balance of coverage in direct articles through total word count rather than only by the number of articles. For this purpose, a direct article was defined as one where either the estate, or an explicit event on the estate was the primary subject matter, or where the estate was the main example used to illustrate the topic of the article.

After categorising all the articles, the content of each article was recorded in a database, which was then examined in order to identify any dominant themes within each category of article. In this, we could establish whether particular themes, events or issues tended to result in coverage of a particular type (negative, mixed, positive and neutral).

**Results**

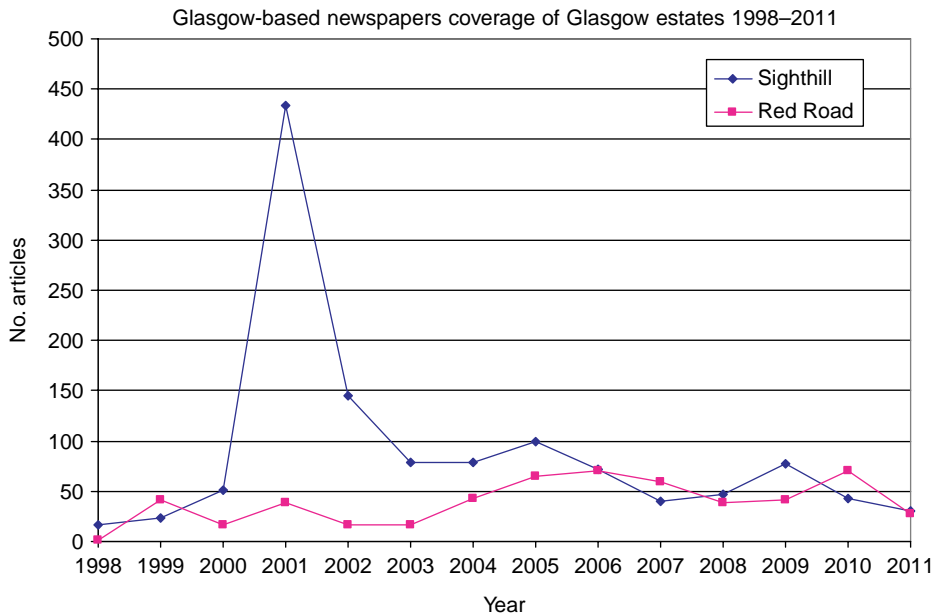
*Volume of Coverage Over Time*

Over the 14 years, we found around 1800 articles about the two estates in the three newspapers, equivalent to almost 12 articles per week over the entire period. There were 2.25 times as many articles about Sighthill as about Red Road: 1237 compared with 550. Figure 1 shows the pattern of coverage over time.

Peaks in coverage for either estate were due to stories related to two issues: asylum seekers and regeneration. Thus, the first and largest peak in news stories about Sighthill occurred following the murder of a Turkish asylum seeker who lived on the estate in 2001; coverage which has been described as ‘sensational and not always accurate’ (Coole, 2002, p. 850). A decade later, the peak in coverage of the Red Road estate in 2010 occurred following the suicide of a Russian asylum seeking family, who lived in and jumped from one of the tower blocks on the estate. Both estates shared a peak in coverage in 2005/2006 due to the initial announcement of regeneration plans for the estates; Sighthill also saw a rise in its coverage in 2009 due to resident opposition to plans for the demolition of the some of the tower blocks on the estate.

*Balance of Coverage*

In the case of both estates, the largest group of articles over time is negative in their coverage. Indeed, allowing for mixed articles, it can be said that around two-thirds of the articles about both estates contain negative content. Only around one-in-ten articles on either estate are wholly positive in content, compared with 4–5 times this amount being wholly negative (Table 1).



**Figure 1.** Volume of press coverage of Sighthill and Red Road, 1998–2011.

**Table 1.** Balance of press coverage of Sighthill and Red Road, 1998–2011

	Sighthill (%)	Red Road (%)
Positive articles	9	9
Mixed articles	19	22
Negative articles	49	41
Neutral articles	23	28
Number of articles	100 (1237)	100 (550)

In the case of Red Road, we identified that 39 per cent of all articles were directly about the estate, with 61 per cent being indirect (where Red Road was discussed for a minority of the space of the article, relate or unrelated to the main topic of the article). As Table 2 shows, articles directly about the estate were more likely to be negative than indirect ones, with four-fifths of direct articles containing negative content. Within direct articles, when examined by word count rather than by articles, the balance of coverage was again slightly more negative and mixed and less neutral.

#### *Differences Between Newspapers*

For all three newspapers, negative stories about the estates were the largest grouping—see Table 3. The broadsheet newspaper was no different to the tabloids in this regard. However, the *Daily Record* was by far the most negative in its coverage, especially of Sighthill, and the least likely to publish positive stories. The local evening tabloid, on the other hand, which does not attempt to cater for a national audience, was the most likely to

**Table 2.** Coverage in direct and indirect articles, Red Road, 1998–2011

	Percentage of articles		Percentage of words
	Indirect	Direct	Direct
Positive	10	9	9
Mixed	14	34	37
Negative	36	47	51
Neutral	40	10	3
Number of articles	100 (336)	100 (214)	

**Table 3.** Balance of coverage for each estate by newspaper, 1998–2011

	The Herald (%)		Evening Times (%)		Daily Record (%)	
	Sighthill	Red Road	Sighthill	Red Road	Sighthill	Red Road
Positive	7	7	12	11	5	4
Mixed	21	16	18	27	16	19
Negative	48	49	45	37	60	47
Neutral	24	28	24	25	19	30

publish positive stories about the estates. The *Evening Times* was also the newspaper which carried most coverage of the two estates, publishing 45 per cent of all articles about Sighthill and 56 per cent of articles about Red Road from 2000 to 2011, highlighting the importance of the ‘local’ press to coverage of individual estates or communities.

*The Subject Matter of Newspaper Stories about the Estates*

Table 4 shows the main topics that were dealt with in articles of different types about the two estates. Three mainstays of negative stories about both estates are asylum seekers and refugees, violence and crime and poor environments, though with similarities and differences in each case.

*Negative stories.* In the case of Sighthill, around a third of all negative articles over the period related to asylum seekers and refugees on the estate. Stories about ‘racial tension’ on the estate, British National Party (BNP) activity and the ‘crisis’ of relations between other residents and asylum seekers were prominent before the murder of Firsat Dag in 2001. The murder itself resulted in a large number of asylum-related stories (see Figure 1), and the anniversary of the murder was used to further highlight racial tensions and the ‘dark days’ of community relations. Poor conditions on the estate have also been described, with concern expressed for the psychological well-being of asylum seekers living there. Similarly, in Red Road’s case, stories about asylum seekers peaked after a tragic event, the suicide of a family whose asylum application had been refused in 2010. This was portrayed as an issue of insensitive asylum policy, but also allied to the nature of the estate itself, being referred to as ‘the Red Road suicides’, with the estate labelled in some cases as ‘suicide central’.

For both estates, stories about violence and crime taking place in the area, or involving people from the area, regularly featured throughout the period. Up to about 2005, many of these stories involved ‘racist attacks’ on asylum seekers, said to be carried out by ‘gangs of youths’. Murders of other residents on both estates have also been reported on several occasions. Other crimes reported from time to time for both estates include burglary, robbery, vandalism and drugs. Sometimes, these feature in resident accounts of living on the estates, and other times due to police arrests or raids (e.g. of drug dealers) on the estates. In such stories, Sighthill is often described as ‘troubled’, and sometimes as ‘notorious’.

**Table 4.** Main subjects covered in articles on the two estates

	Negative stories	Mixed stories	Positive stories
Sighthill	Asylum seekers Violence & crime Poor environment	Asylum seekers Regeneration Demolition plans	Integration efforts Asylum seekers Schools Regeneration Achievements of individuals
Red Road	Living in the flats Violence & crime Poor environment Demolition plans Asylum seeker suicides	Regeneration Integration efforts: youth & asylum seekers Resilience	Community projects Supporting refugees Recognition for the flats Regeneration

The poor environments on the estates are often described in articles, with both being described as 'run down' or 'deprived', though with additional reference to the 'badlands' or 'wasteland' of the Red Road estate. In the case of Red Road, the estate is often used as an example of a wider issue of poverty or deprivation. In the Sighthill case, particular events are described, such as the closure of allotments due to contamination (repeatedly referred to over the years), overcrowding in the flats, low standards of street cleaning and fires in the tower blocks. A major theme mentioned in almost half the negative articles about Red Road were the problems associated with the high-rise flats including poor design and planning (including use of asbestos, small lifts, lack of amenities and physical isolation); poor living conditions (including damp and mould, cramped conditions); bad aesthetics (the flats being described as 'ugly', 'imposing' and 'intimidating') and a lack of neighbourliness. Some articles noted that Red Road had a 'bad reputation' due to its association with 1960s high-rise housing.

*Mixed stories.* The two main sources of mixed stories about the estates were asylum seekers and regeneration. For Sighthill, more mixed articles on the asylum seeker issue reported counter trends to the often-mentioned racism on the estate. This took several forms, including linking 'racial tension' to the 'neglected' or 'poverty-ridden' nature of the estate; criticisms of the dispersal policy which placed asylum seekers on such a deprived estate; reports that the estate had 'turned a corner' and improved its community relations and readers letters criticising the portrayal of the estate as racist by the media and politicians. Mixed articles on the same theme were fewer in number for Red Road, focusing on projects intended to aid the integration of asylum seekers, especially bringing young people together, in the face of crime and racial tension; in this regard, the efforts of the local secondary school, church ministers, the Red Road Family Centre, a police-funded youth diversionary project and the Red Road Integration Project were mentioned.

The regeneration process itself generated mixed coverage of the estates mainly because it provided the opportunity to restate why change was needed and to identify what the estates lacked what regeneration was going to provide in general terms (services, parks, jobs, good housing and an attractive neighbourhood). In addition, residents were described as 'trying to cope' with a 'decaying housing scheme' as regeneration proceeded. The theme of resilience or coping featured in a fifth of the mixed articles about Red Road, with several projects mentioned as 'working against the odds' in the face of deprivation, or being 'an oasis' among 'doomed flats'. Articles mentioned, among others, the Red Road wrestling club, scout group, nursery and family centre and advice centre. Mixed stories about Red Road also included residents' accounts that the estate did not deserve its bad reputation, that in terms of the conditions and the people, it 'wasn't as bad as people thought'.

The treatment by newspapers of demolition as part of regeneration is interesting. The initial decisions to demolish parts of each estate were reported as necessary responses to poor conditions: in Red Road's case as the 'end for city's tower block hell', and for Sighthill as 'another infamous Glasgow high-rise housing scheme is to be pulled down'. However, a subsequent 'Save Our Homes' campaign in Sighthill received regular coverage, leading to criticisms of the landlord's approach for not listening to tenants' concerns, but also readers' letters which mostly criticised the opponents for not being representative and having unsound reasoning for keeping the blocks.

*Positive stories.* Positive stories were the smallest group of articles. Three themes produced positive stories for both estates. First, community venues and projects were positively reported, especially those which provided services to residents (such as housing support, childcare facilities and activities for the elderly) and cultural and arts activities (e.g. ShaRed project; Red Road Young Uns and Sighthill Youth Centre). Second, multicultural projects (such as the North Glasgow International Festival held in Sighthill from 2002 to 2005) produced positive coverage of the estates, as did the welcoming of refugees (e.g. the welcoming of Kosovar refugees to Red Road in 1999), and ongoing efforts to support asylum seekers or to prevent their deportation by the Home Office (on both estates). In this regard, anti-racism activities in schools and the welcoming of refugee children generated significant positive coverage.

On a few occasions, regeneration itself generated wholly positive coverage of the estates. This occurred in two ways. The initial coverage of regeneration announcements for each estate was positive where the amount of investment to be made in millions of pounds was set out, but without any mention of demolitions. Similarly, where details were available of what was to be provided through regeneration in terms of new dwellings, community spaces and play parks, positive coverage could result. However, mixed coverage of regeneration was more common than positive coverage.

Lastly, in the case of Sighthill, positive mentions of the estate related to the achievements of individual residents, volunteers and service workers living or working on the estate, including achievements by asylum seekers. In the case of Red Road, around a dozen articles gave positive mention to the high-rise flats as being historic buildings in Scotland, 'iconic', 'famous' or 'eye-catching'.

### *Dominant Narratives and Distinct Treatment of the Two Estates*

The two estates are similar in two major respects: they both consist predominantly of high-rise flats and they have both contained large proportions of asylum seekers and refugees within their populations over the past decade. Despite this, there are differences in how the estates are treated by the press on the issues of asylum seekers, high-rise flats and regeneration/demolition.

There have been far more articles referring to asylum seekers in Sighthill than in Red Road, even before the murder of Firsat Dag in 2001. When Kosovar refugees arrived in Red Road in 1999, the community was generally described as welcoming, but when wider groups of refugees arrived on both estates in 2000 under a national resettlement programme there were far more stories about local resentment, intimidation and racism, nearly all referring to Sighthill, not Red Road. It was as if Red Road had achieved its positive reputation on this issue a year earlier.

By the following year, 2001, Sighthill's reputation as far as the press was concerned was sealed with the murder of Firsat Dag, reported as if it occurred between two residents on the estate when in fact it occurred off the estate, and the murderer did not come from the estate, but nearby. The murder, and responses to it, formed a mainstay of articles about Sighthill for at least the next 5 years. Dag's murder was said to be inevitable due to racial tensions building for months previously, and thereafter Sighthill was frequently described as having a problem of racism and intolerance. Further, by the end of 2001, Sighthill became the frame of reference for articles discussing general problems of asylum seeker

policy, integration and racism in Scotland: Sighthill was either an exception to 'tolerant' Scotland or, less often, indicative of a growing racism.

In contrast with this is the treatment of Red Road on the same issue. In early 2001, newspapers reported a Scottish Refugee Council estimate that 70 attacks on asylum seekers had taken place on the two estates so far that year—the estates being two of four which received large numbers of asylum seekers under the national dispersal programme. By mid-year, newspapers omitted Red Road when mentioning this estimate, and ascribed all the assaults to Sighthill. When it was revealed that Dag's murderer had earlier attacked another asylum seeker in Red Road, this never prompted similar articles about racial problems on that estate. In due course, after the asylum seeker suicides in Red Road in 2010, and again in contrast to the coverage of Sighthill, articles did not reference previous racial attacks on the estate. Rather, residents were portrayed as standing in solidarity with asylum seekers and the event itself was discussed in relation to living conditions on the estate and the pressures of the asylum process. Thus, Sighthill acquired a dominant narrative for the press, which involved references to its multi-ethnic status and attempts at 'overcoming racial tensions'. This narrative was also used to provide context for stories unrelated to asylum seekers, e.g. demolition, regeneration and other violence. Conversely, general descriptions of Red Road rarely mentioned asylum seekers, multiculturalism or race relations.

However, Red Road has developed its own dominant press narrative relating to high-rise flats. Since the initial suggestion in 2005 that the estate might be demolished, there have been regular historical accounts of Red Road given, which start with Red Road being hailed as the solution to Glasgow's post-war housing problems and held in high regard in comparison to older tenements, including residents memories of life and events on the estate. Such pieces proceed to describe deteriorating conditions on the estate and problems of high-rise living, with demolition plans described as the 'end of an era'<sup>2</sup>. Historical accounts of Sighthill are different, usually starting only in 2000, and talking about the transition from 'racial tensions' to 'breaking down the barriers'. This difference in histories is also reflected in newspaper articles about Glasgow's regeneration and demolition plans as a whole, a large area of activity across the city since 2005, with many tower block 'blow-downs'. Twice as many of these articles mentioned Red Road as an example of such demolition plans as mentioned Sighthill or both estates. Indeed, Red Road is also frequently portrayed in articles as emblematic of the general failure of high rises and of the promise of 1960s public housing, representing the poor planning, design and conditions of 'notorious high-rise schemes'. Newspaper assessments of high-rise living in general make no mention of Sighthill in this regard, despite it being very familiar to journalists.

## **Discussion**

Taking as our starting point the fact that residents of two inner-city mass housing estates in Glasgow identified a predominantly negative external reputation, or 'self-reflecting image', for their areas, we investigated the potential source and content of those negative reputations in the printed media. This was done on the understanding that reputation is a belief about the views of an unidentified majority, created through a transmission process, and that other studies, as noted earlier, have reported that newspapers play a key role in the area reputation process. Indeed, a study of the media in Scotland confirmed that



newspapers were the main source of local news for people, far more than television, and that for news on social issues, newspapers were very closely behind television as the main source (TNS System Three, 2008).

However, media activity has rarely been the focus of neighbourhood reputation studies. One exception is a study of newspaper representations of communities in a Canadian city (McLaren *et al.*, 2005), which showed that there were more stories about deprived communities than non-deprived communities and that a far greater proportion of the stories about deprived communities were negative. Our study went much further than this study in three respects. First, although the Canadian study examined a sample of 17 weeks coverage over an 8.5-year period, we have studied coverage for every week over a 13.7-year period, i.e. 164 weeks in total, making our study of place representations much more extensive. Second, we used a fourfold categorisation of coverage rather than three, introducing a 'mixed' category to acknowledge that sometimes articles balanced positive and negative content. Third, we studied the nature of the content within each of these categories to see what issues or themes generated which type of coverage; this was a new departure for area reputation studies, and addresses the question posed for future study by McLaren *et al.*, namely 'the reasons that lower wellbeing neighbourhoods have lower reputation scores' (2005, p. 192).

Our findings that both study estates featured regularly in the press, with high volume coverage over a long period of time, and that the majority of that coverage contained negative content, with few positive articles, indicate that there is probably merit in the often-stated suggestion that the print media are in all likelihood a major source of negative area reputations for some social housing estates. We also found that local newspapers, again as suggested in the literature (but not previously demonstrated), carried more stories about such estates than nationally focused papers. Although local newspapers carried more positive articles than other newspapers, the sheer volume of their coverage meant that negative stories were still very dominant. Although we have not studied the role of other forms of media, our findings concur with those of other studies which have also emphasised the importance of local newspapers in the reputation process (see our earlier discussion). Furthermore, and in line with our understanding of reputation as a transmission process to create a shared, meta-belief, we consider that the spread and regularity of newspaper coverage make the print media a highly plausible agent in reputation formation and maintenance. That is not to say that other institutional actors, such as housing agencies or crime and safety services, do not also play a role.

The main themes of negative coverage of the estates were the poor environment and poor living conditions in the flats; crime and violence; and issues around asylum seekers. The first of these is clearly something that traditional housing-led or physical regeneration can do something about, but remedying the other two issues is less certain or straightforward. While management and supervision of the areas may reduce local crime and violence, thus generating fewer negative stories, we have also seen that if crimes are committed by people living on the estates, even if the crimes occur elsewhere, the press are likely to use the opportunity to describe the offenders' estates of residence in negative terms in reports of those events. This adds a further dimension to the neighbourhood effects arising from the (re)location of offenders into communities, i.e. not only a higher local crime rate (Hipp & Yates, 2009), but also reinforcing an area's negative reputation if re-offending occurs (no matter where). The decision to locate large numbers of asylum seekers on the estates has cut across regeneration efforts, especially as it was done in a way

which produced local resentment. This development has had a sustained negative effect on the reputations of the estates, due to reports of racist assaults and community tensions. Although the situation has improved over time, because of the way newspapers work (see below), at least one of the estates has carried a negative label of struggling to overcome racial disharmony for some time.

Generally, our findings have shown that it is difficult for regeneration to generate positive stories about the estates, as coverage of such programmes tends to be mixed, due to press repetition of the problems that need tackling. The more specific regeneration programmes can be about investment sums and future developments, the more likely they are to achieve positive coverage, but the economic downturn has slowed regeneration of the estates and made plans uncertain. Our review of positive stories, which are very few in number, indicates the value for the reputation process (as well as for area transformation) of social regeneration being an integral part of renewal programmes. Support for community venues, community development, cohesion and integration projects, and improvements in local services (especially school performance) have all helped produce positive press coverage, and are a potential counter to continuing negative coverage of poor living conditions on the estates. But unfortunately, social regeneration remains a very uncertain, ill-defined and poorly funded part of national and local regeneration policy and practice (Beck *et al.*, 2010).

Lastly, our study has been revealing of how the press operate. The two estates we selected have acquired significant prominence as far as the media are concerned. Similar to the continual coverage given to *people of celebrity*, the estates have been treated as *places of notoriety*, with regular coverage of events on the estates, as well as regular mention of the estates in general stories about social, poverty, housing and other issues. Despite their similarities and nearby location, the estates have acquired *distinct dominant narratives* for use by the press: asylum seeker issues in the case of Sighthill and the decline of high-rise flats in the case of Red Road.

These dominant narratives are used in two ways by the press, both damaging to the estates' reputations. First, as general context setting for stories about events on the estates, transforming many potentially positive stories into mixed stories. Second, the two estates are used as exemplars of national problems or policy questions, e.g. 'how is Scotland developing as a multi-ethnic society?', or 'has post-war council housing or high-rise failed?' It might be said that this approach, firstly, gives readers a more rounded picture of the estates in individual stories; and, secondly, that it brings to life otherwise dry, policy stories. An alternative view, given the continual repetition of such depictions of the estates (including exact replica text from earlier stories), is that it also represents lazy and irresponsible journalism.

## Conclusion

Area reputations are 'real', as we have shown, in the sense that they are readily acknowledged by residents as existing in the world beyond the social housing estates in question, and can be traced to the regular dissemination of press coverage of particular kinds, for specific estates, by local and national newspapers. Whether such reputations have any effect upon the well-being of residents is, however, an unanswered question. Although an association can be found between community well-being indicators (broadly defined) and media representations (McLaren *et al.*, 2005), this does not demonstrate causality. The

causal hypotheses put forward have been twofold: first, that an area with a poor reputation could experience lower levels of social interaction and community involvement, both factors that support positive health, and second, that a poor reputation has a negative psychological impact on the morale and self-esteem of residents (McLaren et al., 2005, p. 192).

This latter hypothesis has been challenged in qualitative research with residents in deprived neighbourhoods, with reports that residents did not view their neighbourhoods as strong determinants of their self-esteem (Flint & Batty, 2010), nor did they 'necessarily conceptualise them in comparative terms in relation to reputation or status' (Flint, 2008, p. 22). However, our findings are contrary to Flint's argument that many residents may not be aware of the image their own neighbourhood has; we found that most people in the estates we studied were indeed aware of their area's negative reputation and that this belief was well founded, given the nature of press coverage over a long period of time. Raised as a research question by him, Flint in effect offers a third causal hypothesis in our view, namely that negative media coverage may influence residents' views of problems in their own neighbourhoods as well as its position relative to other places.

All of these potential pathways between area reputations and residents' health and well-being are worthy of future research. In this, we would once again point out the need to distinguish between reputation and stigma. Although the negative impacts of area stigma have been identified through empirical research (e.g. Dean & Hastings, 2000), the effects of reputation have not, the latter being likely to include social, psychological and psychosocial consequences, as we have seen. And while the discriminatory enactment of area stigma can be identified (e.g. postcode discrimination in the offering or delivery of services) and tackled through legislation, regulation or best practice codes, the establishment and transmission of negative area reputations through the written or spoken word are less easily challenged. We might ask 'When and how will communities have a collective right to reply or a right to bring libel charges against newspapers for the persistent negative portrayal of their areas in the local and national press?' Of course, the newspapers' defence would be that they are merely 'telling it as it is', so that a reputation reversal would have to involve physical, social and economic transformation as well as a discursive and legal challenge. At the moment, this combination of response is mostly lacking for particular estates, enabling the perpetuation of negative area reputations. However, there is also research to be conducted with newspaper editors and journalists to investigate to what extent they are aware of, or concerned about, the effects of their approach towards, and coverage of, disadvantaged areas.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In the case of the *Daily Record/Sunday Mail*, the period ran from July 2000 to August 2011 due to the availability of online sources.

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the first demolition of Red Road flats in 2012 achieved widespread coverage in the local and national press, including a feature piece in *The Guardian* on 7th June, which talked about Red Road as 'part of a huge programme of tower block construction in 60s Glasgow as the city embraced high-rise living...'.

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