'Positive parochialism', local belonging and ecological concerns: revisiting Common Ground's Parish Maps project

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Abstract

Scepticism about the value of parochialism and local belonging has been a persistent feature of geographical scholarship, which has advocated a relational account of place and a cosmopolitan worldview. This paper revisits the Parish Maps project that was instigated in 1987 by UK arts and environment charity Common Ground, which led to the creation of thousands of maps across the UK and beyond, and was appraised in 1996 by Crouch and Matless in this journal. Drawing on archival materials and in-depth interviews, we examine the legacy of the project. We argue that Common Ground's vision for Parish Maps represents a 'positive parochialism' that confidently asserts the validity of the parish without retreating towards insularity. We complicate this by revealing diverse ways that communities took up Common Ground's vision. We conclude by arguing that the view of parochialism manifest by Parish Maps offers a foundation for ecological concern that remains relevant today, with places offering the potential for solidarities that bring together local and incomer. This 'positive parochialism' disturbs assumptions that local attachments are necessarily exclusive and indicates the unresolved challenge of finding ways to realise the value of affect and creative environmental engagement in wider policy and land-use planning.

1. Introduction: finding Common Ground

In 1996, Crouch and Matless published an appraisal of the arts and environmental charity Common Ground's Parish Maps Project (begun in 1987) in *Transactions*. The appraisal focussed on the way that the project prompted critical reflections in four areas of cultural geography at the time. These included: a reworking of the idea of the map; a refiguring of the idea of place; a

reflection on the limitations of the 'parish'; and an exploration of the role of aesthetics in the project (and to cultural geography more broadly). In each of these areas, they found what they called a 'contradictory politics of place […] inhabited by both the conservative and transformative, the radical and reactionary' (237). They argued that in 'confirming or reshaping the contours of place', the parish map articulates, or 'exercises', a performative social function above and beyond the cartographic representation of the place (253).

While Crouch and Matless drew attention to the double-edged sword of the localism promoted by parish mapping, they revealed something of the creative work that goes on within the community to sustain the life of any place ('sustain' in this sense, is used to suggest both continuity and adaptation). This might refer to the way in which the identity of a place is always being rearticulated through the social interactions that happen there. It might also refer to the way in which decisions are taken that alter the material attributes of a place (as when, for example, small scale conservation activities might stimulate biodiversity). Whether social or material, or both together, this creative work recalls the idea of 'dwelling' in its most active and ongoing sense (Heidegger 1971: 141-43).

Today this might bring to mind Tim Ingold's definition of 'the dwelling perspective'. As distinct from 'the building perspective' (based on an assumption that the world is an external *tabula rasa* onto which I impose my prefigured form in an act of inscription and installation (Ingold 1995: 178-9)), the 'dwelling perspective' reveals place as always already immersed in ongoing processes of becoming, thus recuperating some of the complex and situated activity of a place. It acknowledges its existing textures while turning them toward the future, toward improvisation and adaptation. The parish map is an unusually apt form for exploring the dwelling perspective, grounded as it is from the beginning in various social and cultural processes concerned with negotiating the identity of a place. '[T]he forms people build,' Ingold suggests, 'whether in the imagination or on the ground, arise within the current of their involved activity, in the specific relational contexts of their practical engagement with their surroundings' (1995: 186). In parish mapping, these 'practical engagements' were quite diverse, from the making of the map itself – its often very long processes of dialogue and consultation – to the range of activities and social formations that followed.

In the more than twenty years since Crouch and Matless' article, the political landscape has changed. Government planning initiatives have recognised the processes described by Ingold and attempted to take heed of the popular feeling around localism. Initially rather tokenistic in form

under the 1997 Labour government[1], actual decision-making power has begun to be ceded to local communities since the coalition government's 2011 Localism Bill. Policies such as Neighbourhood Development Plans are strongly embedded in the rhetoric of local attachments and empowerment:

> 'People around the country value and love the places they live in … To make sure that you and your neighbour have the community you aspire to, the government has given you new legal powers and new opportunities to preserve what you like and change what you don't like about the city, town or village you live in' (Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) 2017, 1).

Jane Wills (2016) has explored how this new localism worked effectively in case studies of neighbourhood community budgets, co-operative councils and neighbourhood planning. She concludes that there is a lot more to be done if this act of empowerment is to be made meaningful, including 'institution building' at the local and neighbourhood scale (2016, 143). As Matless and Crouch have shown, one thing that Parish Maps were particularly good at was the *ad hoc*, improvised, grassroots institution building in ways that were not reliant on top-down forms of empowerment. Parish Maps were, if nothing else, processes of *instituting* (recalling Maurice Merleau-Ponty's recognition of 'institution' as a word denoting a process rather than a fixed entity, Summa, 2017). They instituted social alliances, community work, practical activities, historical societies, research projects and even planning battles.

Yet localism policy has also been strongly critiqued for the ways that it has been imposed on communities (a top-down, 'guided localism', Stanton 2014, 271) based on devolution of power but not resources (an 'austerity localism', Featherstone et al. 2012, 177) and these are critiques that Wills acknowledges. Tait and Inch (2016) argue that the localism agenda will further social inequalities by suggesting the 'naturalness' of bottom-up, uneven development and offers a narrow vision of localism, based on an imaginary of the English country village that is restrictive of the range of more urban or progressive forms that localism could take.

It is in the context of this new political landscape and these arguments over the merits of localism that we revisit Common Ground's Parish Maps Project with the aim of reflecting on the project's unusually successful level of public engagement. At the time of the project's beginning in 1987, Common Ground (then just four years old) was a charity employing only a handful of individuals and a lot of good will. And yet, in just two years they had inspired over 1,000 parish map projects (Mayfield, 1995) and by 1996 Matless and Crouch recorded 'over 1,500 completed'

(1996: 245). New Parish Maps are still being made today and nobody has an accurate figure since official record keeping stopped in the 1990s.

Common Ground was established as an arts and environmental charity in 1983 by Sue Clifford, Angela King, and Roger Deakin with the intention of working closely with the arts to inspire and embolden people and communities across the country to attend to, protect and celebrate their local environments. Matless and Crouch make this clear, drawing out the charity's commitment to promote an ''ecology of the imagination' where questions of conservation could 'only be answered in a social context by a continuing cultural debate'' (Clifford and King quoted in Matless and Crouch 1996: 236). An important fact that Matless and Crouch do not note is that Clifford, King and Deakin had all been key members of Friends of the Earth UK during the 1970s and that Common Ground had been formed as a splinter group after some frustration with the direction of environmental campaigning at the time.

As Friends of the Earth was growing, their communications with government institutions were becoming more professionalised and, for Clifford and King, there was a clear danger of the work being steered by professionals 'just speaking to other professionals' and that 'people and their everyday lives were being pushed out' (Clifford qtd. in Stearn 1988, 29). Their concern was put concisely by the novelist John Fowles in one of Common Ground's later publications: 'The scientists are the experts, they must know best; I don't. Is not all the power, the knowledge of means, the authority, theirs? I need do nothing, for the very simple reason that I cannot' (Fowles 1989, 16). Common Ground's turn to the arts was an attempt to draw the public back into the debate by shifting the discourse of ecological concerns away from a preoccupation with statistical data measured at the national scale to a concern with 'the everyday, the ordinary, the unofficial, the personal' (Matless, 1995, 56).

> 'From the beginning, Common Ground stated their mission: To promote the importance of common plants and animals, familiar and local places, local distinctiveness and our links with the past; and to explore the emotional value these things have for us by forging practical and philosophical links between the arts and the conservation of nature and landscapes' (Clifford and King, 1984: vii).

Informed by the environmental slogan 'think globally, act locally', Common Ground's method of working was to develop imaginative and eye-catching ideas that people across the country would feel inspired to take up in their own locality, including Parish Maps, Apple Days and Community Orchards. Their approach was informed by cultures of direct action in the 1970s and it had a dual impact: on the one hand it saw local attempts to protect local landscapes and wildlife; on the

other hand, and perhaps more importantly, it saw a stimulation of environmental citizenship and grassroots democracy some time before these things would become prioritised by Local Agenda 21 in the 1990s.

Both the emotional value of familiar places and collective action for ecological conservation have remained topics of geographical research and debate in the 20 years since Crouch and Matless' article was published. Local belonging and place have been the subject of ongoing critical debate about the value of parochialism. Massey's influential arguments for a 'global sense of place' (1993) emphasised non-essentialist and non-parochial conceptions of place that assert multiple and changing forms of identity (1993, 2005). Massey's arguments have had impact precisely because they articulate ways of conceptualising place that avoid a conservative and exclusionary politics. However, they have led to a somewhat condescending consensus about local belonging: that it inevitably bounds places that are interconnected; that it essentialises place meanings, promotes insularity and prevents a more progressive form of belonging that is multiple, relational and provisional (Massey 2009, Amin 2004). We critique this consensus, arguing that local belonging is not inevitably exclusionary. Nor is it inevitably progressive, as Massey recognised: "equally, to argue unequivocally for open spaces and open places may leave the less powerful places (the space of the domestic, the places of indigenous culture) open to indiscriminate invasion and disruption" (1996, 123).

Common Ground's approach to place reveals a persistent tension between the conservative and the radical, veering between 'historically essential and dialectical versions of the local' (Crouch and Matless, 1996, 238). Parish Maps was founded upon a self-motivated and performative articulation of place, aspiring to a sense of place that is pluralist (multiple) and open-ended (provisional). 'As many different places as there are individuals and groups will effectively cohabit an area. Any sense that a map may easily trace one place-bound community is problematized' (Crouch & Matless, 1996, 238).

Common Ground framed parochialism positively and valued local knowledge:
'Be positively parochial. Never forget that YOU are an expert in your own place. No one knows what you think or feel unless YOU say so' (1990, quoted in Crouch and Matless 1996).

Tomaney (2012) and Stafford (2010) support this more positive view of the parochial, drawing on the Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh as a point of reference. For Kavanagh, 'parochial' describes someone 'never in any doubt about the social and artistic validity of his parish' (2003, 237). To be parochial represents a sense of confidence in local place-identity that can be open without

necessarily adopting a prescribed relation to what is beyond its borders in the form of insularity and exclusion. As Heaney observed, 'Kavanagh gave you permission to dwell without cultural anxiety among the usual landmarks of your life …. He broadcast a voice that would not be cowed into accents other than its own' (2002, 140). Kavanagh distinguished the 'parochial' from the 'provincial', with the latter encapsulating a lack of confidence in local (typically rural) place identity arising from a deferential attitude towards a distant (typically metropolitan) centre. Kavanagh's way of thinking about parochialism recognises its complexity and in so doing disturbs the condescending consensus in the literature about local belonging. It illustrates how artistic engagements can offer creative possibilities to overcome perceived binaries between local and universal (Tomaney, 2012). As Stafford noted, 'if work deemed 'local' might be greeted by condescension or neglect in certain quarters, it emerges here triumphantly as the very kernel of aesthetic value' (2010, 4). Dirlik proposed a similar view that creative engagement can offer a way of imagining local distinctiveness and identity while acknowledging porous boundaries, interconnections and interdependencies (1999).

These issues of interconnection and boundary crossing are a reminder that any re-appraisal of Parish Maps must account for the place of dwelling in an age of mobilities. Over the past two decades, different forms of mobility have proliferated, driven by market forces, homogenisation of environments, new technologies, media transformations and related cultural trends of late modernity (Auge, 1995; Beatley, 2004; Appadurai, 2008; Urry, 2003). The 'new mobilities paradigm' (e.g. Sheller & Urry, 2016; Urry, 2000) has critiqued a 'sedentarist' approach to social relations (Cresswell, 2006), and emphasised the varied and complex ways in which people move, both physically and virtually, across the globe. However, there is little evidence that place has become less visible or valued in contemporary societies (Lewicka, 2011).

What has become clearer are the ways that mobilities foster novel forms of attachment and belonging. Rishbeth (2013) observed 'transnational attachments' amongst first generation migrants to the UK, using located storytelling to trace connections between Sheffield and the Yemen. In this case, mobility has not lessened the importance of the local, but instead fostered attachments to multiple localities and connections between distant places. Similarly to the concept of 'active place attachment' in environmental psychology (Lewicka, 2011; Bailey et al., 2016), Savage and colleagues identify 'elective belonging' as a characteristic of middle class 'incomers' in parts of Manchester that were congruent with their values, lifestyles and identities (2005). This was contrasted with 'dwelling' and 'nostalgia' (Savage et al., ibid), orientations to place characteristic of less mobile and often less privileged residents. While both 'dwelling' and

'nostalgia'are characterised by long residence in the home place, dwelling represents a positive, yet passive attitude to the place in contrast to a nostalgic sense of displacement arising from the arrival of newcomers with different cultural orientations and social status, more resonant of Cresswell's concept of 'stuckness' (2012).

Common Ground's vision for Parish Maps recognised many ways to articulate what is of value in the locality:

> 'It is crucial that knowledge, new ideas and wisdom are shared. The tumbleweed expertise of the professional learnt and practised all over the place, the migrant with new cultural eyes, the indigene with generations of often undervalued place-based wisdom, all have different richnesses of perception to offer' (Clifford and King 1993, 17).

This inclusive approach to valuing and sharing diverse forms of local knowledge and affective relations with place is similar to what Savage et al. (2005) describe as the potential for place to enable 'new kinds of solidarities' between local and incomer that lead to collective action (53). It is significant that the concept of 'local distinctiveness' arose in Common Ground's work in the context of early environmental activism in the UK and elsewhere (e.g. Agenda 21, United Nations 1992). Interconnection and interdependence were thought to be best understood by picking up the trace of global processes in local environments. Reflecting Crouch and Matless' (1996) identification of a contradictory politics of place evident within Parish Maps that encompasses both radical and reactionary, research has revealed how sense of place has been drawn upon to protest against proposals for 'development' that are regarded as destroying local place character and 'industrialising' rural landscapes (Escobar 2001, Dalby and Mackenzie 1999, Garavan 2009; Devine-Wright and Howes 2010; Murphy and Smith 2013; Batel et al. 2015)[2].

Conceiving parochialism as a means to collectively assert ecological concerns is both timely and pressing. To take one issue, biodiversity loss has proliferated in recent decades as a consequence of agricultural intensification and changing land use patterns (Mace et al., 2014). Recent studies have shown that flying insects have declined by 75% in nature reserves in Germany over the past three decades (Hallmann et al., 2017) and that hedgehogs were identified in only 22% of rural habitats in England and Wales (Williams et al., 2018). Yet it is known that Parish Maps sometimes led to communities taking action on biodiversity, for example to create a wild flower meadow in the parish of Uplyme in Dorset. Parochialism might also provide a less pejorative alternative to the 'NIMBY' (Not In My Back Yard) discourse of local objections to unwanted development (Burningham et al. 2015). More fundamentally, it accords with an interpretation of land-use planning controversies as under-written by fundamentally contrasting, yet rarely

articulated spatialities (Drenthen, 2010). According to Drenthen, objectors hold an 'ethic of the particular' that is founded upon emotional attachments to and characterisations of the local as unique and valuable, which are 'hard to account for in the policy process' which 'denies them the rationality that is needed to have any universal binding force in policy discussions' (2010, 322). In contrast, developers hold a universalist, Cartesian perspective that regards sites of development as comparable, substitutable and even sacrificial in the face of national or global concerns (Drenthen, ibid).

Taken together, we argue that Common Ground's approach to the local, and the Parish Maps project in particular, still has relevance for wider debates about parochialism, local belonging and ecological concerns. We build on Crouch and Matless' (1996) consideration of parish mapping as involving enduring tensions between radicalism and conservatism, openness and closure. We extend their analysis in two ways. First, we go back to key actors involved in UK environmental policy making and practice in the 1980s, with the aim of identifying how the Parish Maps project was received at the time and what contemporary significance it might still be regarded to have. Second, we give voice to those who instigated parish maps in communities around the UK, probing diverse articulations of parochialism and the uses to which maps were subsequently put. We draw out the ways in which Parish Maps are situated within wider performative processes of identity articulation and look in particular at cases where the maps were used to protect places from unwanted forms of change in land use planning disputes.

2. Method

We draw on primary data from sixteen semi-structured interviews that were conducted between September 2014 and June 2016, along with letters and reproductions of maps from the Common Ground archive at the University of Exeter, UK. Interviewees (see Table 1) were selected in order to provide a broad range of perspectives from inside and outside of the process. Three interviews were conducted with individuals who worked on the Parish Maps project in the 1980s and 1990s; three were held with individuals who worked for other UK environment or heritage institutions that were contemporaries of the Parish Maps project (e.g. Countryside Commission, Natural England) and the remainder were held with individuals who had been directly involved in mapping their local places. Interviewees were chosen to ensure a diversity of map exemplars, following criteria such as the aesthetics/materials used and geographical diversity, encompassing urban and rural areas, north and south of England.

Each interview was recorded with participants' consent, then transcribed following a conventional format (Bryman 2008). Thematic analysis (Bryman 2008) of the transcripts was used to elucidate themes relating to parish mapping, with open coding used to arrive at main themes and subthemes relevant to the research aims (Strauss & Corbin 1990). Transcripts were distributed across the authorial team for analysis involving a series of face-to-face and virtual meetings representing an iterative process of proposal, probes and challenge by the authors, informed by Valentine's (2006) commentary on how sharing data can enhance rigor and relevance in qualitative data analysis.

Table 1: List of Interviewees

Type of interviewee	Name of organisation or locality	Interview label
Contemporary environmental organisations	Natural England	NE
	Countryside Commission	CC
	Dartmoor National Park Authority	DNPA
Mapping project officers	Common Ground	PO1
	Common Ground	PO2
	Sussex County Council	PO3
Community representatives	Sunniside, Gateshead	Sunniside
	Lockwood, Yorkshire	Lockwood
	Thirsk, Yorkshire	Thirsk
	Calverton[3], Nottinghamshire	Calverton
	Barrow upon Soar, Leicestershire	Barrow
	Westbury Park, Bristol	Westbury
	Chagford, Devon	Chagford
	Copthorne, Sussex	Copthorne
	Uplyme, Dorset	Uplyme
	Chideok, Dorset	Chideok

3. Findings

Our findings are structured in three sections. First, we discuss Common Ground's approach to the Parish Maps project, and the ways that their aspirations were taken up, drawing on interviews with stakeholders, Common Ground employees and community mappers. Second, we critically reflect on the ways that Parish Maps were put into practice to assert local place identity, distinctiveness, cohesion and relationality. Finally, we discuss the ways that Parish Maps were drawn upon by community mappers to intervene in land-use planning decision-making and to prevent unwanted forms of development. Numbers in brackets reflect interview page numbers, with anonymized quotations from each interviewee (see Table 1).

3.1: A positive parochialism?

For those involved in environmental policy and practice during the 1980s, Common Ground's 'gentleness' (PO1,2 – also noted by Crouch and Matless, 1996: 236) contrasted with the 'fire and brimstone' (PO1,1) of other environmental advocacy of the period. Their tactics were said to be indirect but effective:

> 'they weren't coming at this telling people what to do […] they might set a few ideas rolling, but they would actually sit back and let people come to them, that in itself was revolutionary for that time' (PO1,10)

Common Ground's approach was not only distinctive, but thought to foster change that would be more sustainable, arising from peoples' own decision to act in a manner recalling McCall and Minang's description of 'self-mobilization' (2005, 342). Another interviewee described the charity along similar lines as 'a bizarre and beautiful exception' (CC, 6). He continued: 'Not pursuing great advocacy campaigns like many – like Friends of the Earth or CPRE [Campaign for the Protection of Rural England] – and not having national branches everywhere, not having a mass of members.' (CC, 6) He reflected that this 'light-footed' approach 'was appealing to the villages and to the people that took part in apple days and orchards and things. It made them unthreatening, unofficial, unpompous, rooted' (CC, 6-7).

Common Ground's refusal to take a 'guided' (Stanton 2014) or didactic stance on issues that were nonetheless felt to be urgent suggests an attitude to conservation and activism rooted in a tradition of thought associated with local autonomy, self-organisation, even some forms of anarchism that were current at the time (see Ward 1973). The appeal of such an approach should

be understood in the context of an ideological atmosphere during the 1980s of 'authoritarian liberalism' and included the withdrawal of power from local authorities, the suppression of dissent and an overt opposition to the environmental movement (Dryzek et al., 2003, 43).

Moving from approach to practice, Common Ground supported communities in creating their own Parish Maps, eschewing a standardized programme of implementation. They encouraged and championed a variety and diversity of interpretation consistent with their emphasis upon local distinctiveness. However, our interviews suggest that some groups gravitated towards more conservative interpretations, falling short of the project's creative, unconventional aspirations. As one project officer remembered:

'I was always a bit disappointed when, to see Parish Maps being produced as almost kind of replicas of official kind of planning processes that didn't have a sense of spirit or distinctiveness' (PO1,9).

Nevertheless, we found instances when Parish Maps celebrated important local features that were unlikely to be emphasized on an official map. At Westbury Park, Bristol (see Figure 1), a pub that had featured on a TV programme was included in the map 'even though it's an appalling building now and would never appear on any normal criteria as a landmark, but it's important to us' (Westbury, 9). This map had a distinctive presentation as well, partly inspired by the form of a Monopoly board game and comprising an 'A2 sheet that you have to cut up, fold and glue together such that the neighbourhood in the middle pops out in three dimensions', described as 'the world's only three-dimensional popup map' (Westbury, 5).

Insert Figure 1 about here

In Lockwood, Yorkshire, there was disagreement over the inclusion of a shale tip, with some residents arguing that it should be excluded because of its ugly appearance and others arguing – successfully - that it communicated the heritage of industrial mining in the area. Similarly, in Barrow upon Soar, Leicestershire, there was debate over the inclusion of a local cement works, with advocates arguing that its inclusion was appropriate for a mapping process that was about 'warts and all' (Barrow, 10).

These examples reveal symbolic conflicts over whether to include local features that were considered to transgress idealized, conservative and essentialised representations of the 'chocolate box' rural village (Cresswell 1996; Batel et al. 2015). Their inclusion might stigmatise the locality (Simmons and Walker 2004), and create tensions amongst residents. Given how Massey has emphasized the continually changing basis of place (2005), this is itself a challenge arising from the need to agree, even 'fix', what is seen to be distinctive about a place at one point in time amid cross-currents of vying aesthetics. The village of Copthorne was described by one interviewee as 'not a beautiful village, by any means, it's…, we don't have a village centre or anything like that, but we have a good community spirit. So that's what it [the map] shows, doesn't it?' (Copthorne, 2).

Insert Figure 2 about here

In this case (see Figure 2), it is initially quite hard to make out the cartographic representation of the village since the form it takes is that of an image of a tree. Long lines of family names make up the roots and dominate the lower half of the image, a variety of different designs printed on acorns (bearing the logos of local businesses, clubs and societies) form a strong border around the tree, while the village's roads and avenues recede as gaps in the foliage. It is strikingly beautiful as a map but it doesn't conform to the stereotype 'chocolate box' picture of rural life, foregrounding, rather, the lively social and economic activity of the place. Following Deller and Kane (2005), we might describe this as a 'folk' aesthetic. Haunting the 'chocolate box' aesthetic is a tradition in which the aesthetics of national heritage have made the landscape image a metonym for the whole nation – what Williams calls 'an unlocalised "Old England"' – and evacuated it of distinctive detail related to the social and economic life of the inhabitants (Williams 1973, 20; see also Tait & Inch, 2016). The 'folk' aesthetic restores some of this social and economic life.

A large number of maps were facilitated in West Sussex at the turn of the millennium. Interviewing an employee involved in the project, the purpose of the Millennium Maps was not so much to express local distinctiveness as to create 'a very realistic record of life today [around the millennium]' (Sussex, 6). However, although he commended one map that was entirely framed by images of traffic congestion, made by children in Turner's Hill, West Sussex, he was critical of many other community groups that had created maps at that time:

'West Sussex …. has got so many beautiful villages, but also, there are also blackspots and we need to record those. But they did not want to record them … And I felt that sometimes

they were trying to paint a picture themselves, bearing in mind a lot of them were owners

of expensive property, as though they were estate agents, trying to sell their place'

(Sussex, 5).

Three 'genres' of Parish Map can be identified here then: the locally distinctive map, which struggled to agree and articulate a meaningful 'folk' identity for the place based on processes of discussion, debate and activity; the realistic record of 'warts and all', intended as a faithful historical document at a significant time; and the 'chocolate box' map, which excluded aspects thought to be ugly according to a superficial aesthetic of 'Old England'. Each of these represents a slightly different 'place-frame' with a different motivation driving its 'discursive articulation' (Martin 2003, 746).

Where mappers struggled with these tensions and resisted the 'chocolate box' appearance in favour of something locally distinctive, the map was often a part of an ongoing series of local activities. Maps were reproduced in quantity and the arising funds paid for: a new wild flower meadow (Uplyme), boundary walks (Lockwood, Aveton Gifford) and books of walks (various), benches (Harting, Uplyme), equipment for village halls (Chideock) and signboards (various). These examples indicate the tensions and dilemmas involved when Parish Maps were undertaken in practice. They reveal multiple and sometimes conflicting aspirations – to agree and establish local distinctiveness, to faithfully record, to idealise, to raise funds and to produce goods that would bolster pride and establish place identity as distinctive in wider contexts. The struggle to performatively articulate local distinctiveness can be understood as a form of 'positive parochialism' in a way that those instances of the 'chocolate box' aesthetic cannot.

3.2: Place-making and identity: inclusive and relational?

One of Common Ground's main aims was to celebrate "the local distinctiveness of your own place" as it "can recharge batteries, build a sense of identity" (cited in Crouch & Matless 1996, 237). In a number of cases, parish mapping led to a novel curiosity about the physical or political extent of the parish as a geographical unit, and as one mapper put it, to 'give you an identity' (Copthorne, 1). Community groups used parish mapping to identify and legitimize place boundaries and to agree distinctive local landmarks. In Westbury Park**,** the map-making process began with a workshop that considered the questions 'Where is Westbury Park?' and 'Does Westbury Park exist?' (Bishop 1990, 1). In addition, participating in Parish Maps provided a context for individuals to openly articulate, sometimes for the first time, their personal identification with the place (Antonisch 2009), as emphasised at Chagford, Devon:

'This person who said to me, you know, it's the single most "significant" thing I've done in my life. To her, that was, she was local she was born here, so in a sense I do think it did bring something of Chagford very prominently into her experience.' (Chagford, 15)

In terms of collective outcomes, one project officer argued that asserting place identity via Parish Maps 'brought together scattered community', with 'psychological effect' (Sussex, 2,5). In one Nottinghamshire village, it was recognized that: 'There's some use in the process because it gives you some time to reflect and come together as a community' (Calverton 1, 7). These examples suggest ways that parish mapping had consequences for creating or further reifying boundaries and relationships identified by Crouch and Matless (1996) between individual/social and human/environment that necessarily involved both inclusions and exclusions.

Common Ground's vision for Parish Maps was a process that involved diverse local people ('professionals', 'migrants', 'indigenes' - Clifford and King 1993, 17) coming together in an inclusive process, recognising many different ways to articulate what is of value in the locality. Appreciating the 'wisdom' of the 'indigene' suggests a respect for individuals characterized by environmental psychologists as expressing 'traditional' place attachment, (Lewicka 2013) and by sociologists as expressing 'dwelling' arising from longstanding local residence, sometimes across generations (Savage et al., 2005).

Nevertheless, our interviews suggested that the individuals instigating Parish Maps were more likely to be middle-class and hold professional qualifications, to express an 'active' variety of place attachment (Lewicka, ibid), similar to what sociologists have described as 'elective belonging' (Savage et al., 2005), which reflects mobile, educated individuals who have chosen to move into an area. Category distinctions amongst local residents were reflected in interviewees' accounts of the mapping process. In Thirsk, Yorkshire, the Parish Map was viewed as a means to emplace 'incomers' in the parish, encouraging emotional attachment to the locality, and to give voice to the 'natives':

'And for the incomers, it was a way of getting to know the place, perhaps becoming part of the fabric of where you're putting your roots down … and I think in many ways the natives realised that their voice was being listened to which to a degree wasn't happening before' (Thirsk, 22).

Some went to great lengths to achieve the widest possible opportunity for inclusiveness. In Redlynch, the group distributed 900 questionnaires via the milkman that were subsequently collected in at the Post Office as a way of getting people to nominate what they wanted to see included on the map (Common Ground 1987, 13). Some targeted particular communities that they

were concerned might be left out. In Chideock, the map was succeeded by a book on local history, the last chapter of which was given over to photography by children representing their version of the village (Chideock, 36).

Given that the project began with an exhibition that travelled around the country in 1987, community mappers were aware of diverse approaches taken by artists and communities in the making of maps. The whole project might be understood, in fact, as founded on a celebration of variety and heterogeneity. The distinctiveness of each place relied on championing what set it apart from others. This informed a different aspect of relationality, the tendency to view local mapping in comparison to those from elsewhere, or a generalized notion of what an 'ideal' Parish Map should look like. In Copthorne, community mappers revealed a reflexivity concerning how their own efforts compared to other communities, with an evaluation of local inclusion central to their perspective:

> 'We have seen some that have obviously just been a couple of people doing it. Where they have, it was very very high standard but we feel lacks the community feel of ours, because ours we know that was everybody.' (Copthorne, 6)

Open and relational as this aspect of Parish Maps might be, beyond the exhibition of the maps together, the positive affinities formed between places appear to have been quite weak. There are exceptions. The mapping group in Lockwood travelled down to a group in Buckland Newton in Dorset 'and had a look at theirs, which gave us more ideas' (Lockwood, 1). But the relationship does not seem to have lasted, and the maps rarely fulfil what Featherstone et al. describe as 'progressive localism' by 'creat[ing] positive affinities between places and groups negotiating global processes (2012, 179). These examples from disparate places reveal the tensions involved in parish mapping when asserting identity, devising an inclusive process and relating the local and non-local. In the following section, we will highlight some of the outcomes of these tensions in relation to the way Parish Maps were used in planning disputes.

3.3: Afterlives: Parish Maps and local planning disputes

Crouch & Matless highlighted that 'mapping is presented as a process of self-alerting, putting people on their toes against unwanted change and producing an active sense of community' (236). In so doing, Parish Maps can be said to have brought forward the main tensions associated with place change and conservation, the radical and the reactionary. Mapping provided a process within which the community could identify and reflect on the ways that a place had changed over

time and begin to play an active role in the future of that change; as well as being undertaken at moments when development was being proposed and objected to.

Parish Maps were presumed by community groups, Common Ground employees and perhaps even planning professionals to be a shorthand for 'what matters' to local people, partly arising from its participatory process, and partly from its visual aesthetic. Promotional material for the project included advice such as 'After the Map: What Next?' (Common Ground, [1987b], n.p.), indicating how Common Ground intended Parish Maps to continue to play an active role beyond their completion, resisting the tendency to see it as a discrete project to hang on the wall and forget about:

'this [latter] attitude reduces the parish map to a consumer item … and fails to recognize how the 'finished' map should be used as a stimulus for further activity and community involvement' (Greeves, 1988, n.p.).

A function of the making of the maps is the simple fact of the formation of a group invested in caring for the place. One contemporary of Common Ground went as far as to suggest that 'before Parish Maps came along nobody went along to planning enquiries to talk about their interest in local vernacular or whatever' (NE, 15). While this is perhaps an exaggeration, it does indicate that the parish maps stimulated interest and in some cases were actually brought along and displayed at council meetings and planning inquiries in contexts where words alone were judged insufficient. This is hardly surprising, since by their very nature, parish maps were attempts to render what was locally intangible (affects, memories, stories) into something concrete and tangible.

In Chideock, when the construction of a new bypass was proposed, a resident gave a copy of the map to the planning inspector 'with the line of the bypass marked on' (Chideock, 36). She also gave a copy to the Chief Planning Officer 'to have on his wall in the Planning Office so that – well it's just to show what matters' (Chideock, 36). She viewed the map as evidence of what was valued about the place:

'You see the other thing is you can always say, look – when someone's decided they're going to knock something down or do something you say "Hang on a minute. That was something that the children picked that is meaning something to them. It's special to them." You know, and here is the evidence, you know.' (Chideock, 44)

Parish Maps were seen as having agency and power directed both internally (to the community) and externally (to developers, to planning inspectors) at the immediate time of their making and in later years. Across many of the examples, maps arose from or were subsequently used for protective struggles over proposed developments, often concerning housing but also transport

and energy infrastructure. Residents assumed that expressing valued local features on the map was a way of publicising their importance, and that the care for the particular or locally distinctive (Drenthen 2010) underlying the act of mapping would be respected by developers and planners. From Thirsk:

> 'They're [the developers] vandals because they don't think, but if it's pointed out to them the significant number will actually do their best to respect that and that was one of the principle ideas behind the parish map. That if you can point to something concrete you can say look there you are that's evidence that people care, you know not just well it's my view, not just anecdotal.' (Thirsk, 12)

However, such a viewpoint overlooks statutory processes of land-use planning, which set out specific rules about what is considered material in decision-making.

The negative consequence of heightened expectations about the agency of a map in planning procedures was most clearly revealed in the case of Calverton, Nottinghamshire. Attempts to use the Parish Map as evidence to protect a green space in the village from unwanted development led to feelings of disillusionment and mistrust. Use of the map to express the value of a field in the centre of the village was seen to be ignored. The conflict over this green space was portrayed as a conflict of values, contrasting the particularity of a valued place (Drenthen, 2010) to a housing developer offering to substitute one place for another:

> 'When people invest certain emotional value on a place it becomes more important almost than individual lives. It doesn't equate to an area of land. When you hear developer's say 'Well, if we take this area of green space we will offset it by giving you a green space of equal size somewhere else', that completely negates any value that you invest in a place for the sake of that particular place where so many people have used it in a certain way over such a long period of time.' (Calverton 1, 6)

In contrast to the confident aspirations expressed in Thirsk, at Calverton the lack of agency of the map to protect the place in formal planning procedures was a source of disappointment.

Deficiencies in how parish maps could be used in local planning were portrayed as part of a wider spatial discourse of environmental injustice (Walker 2009), with communities in 'the South' of England seen to have more value than those in the Midlands. District planning authorities were said to lack the local sensibility of parish councils, and local opinions ignored. What was sought was a way of integrating planning across scales from local (parish) to national, enabling Parish Maps to become material and credible sources of evidence about local care and attachments:

'If you could at a political level have an agenda for something like the village map project to be recognised at a national level so that they could then perhaps be revisited and revised but given some credence and some weight that went beyond the level of the local level.' (Calverton 1, 9)

The Calverton example highlights ways that the maps failed in, or were failed by, land use planning disputes. Here an open-ended, affect-laden, creative, locally driven process that emphasises the value of the common place can be contrasted with the more recent initiative of Neighbourhood Development Planning, which is nationally proscribed, formal, legalistic, voted upon in a local referendum and carries statutory weight (Wills 2016). Both reflect discourses of Localism, yet in fundamentally different ways, with Parish Maps' creative and gentle approach to local distinctiveness offering a poignant contrast to the 'guided localism' (Stanton, 2014) of development planning.

4. Conclusions

This paper sought to contribute to longstanding debates concerning local belonging, parochialism and ecological concerns, through empirical analysis and critical discussion of Common Ground's Parish Maps project. Our findings indicate that the project represents a form of 'positive parochialism' that calls to mind Kavanagh's distinction between the provincial and the parochial (Stafford, 2010). The concept of 'local distinctiveness' confidently asserted the value of the local, without any sense of anxiety at what was familiar and commonplace. It encouraged communities to become more knowledgeable about and appreciative of their local environment; to debate and assert forms of identity associated with the distinctive heritage of the place; and to establish cohesion through inclusive and shared values and meanings. While there is little to suggest that Parish Maps led to an outward facing, progressive sense of place (cf. Massey, 2005) or a progressive form of localism (Featherstone et al., 2012), there is also little to suggest that it fostered greater insularity. This suggests that, against the common consensus, local belonging need not be inevitably insular and exclusive, at least as envisioned by Common Ground's founders and project officers, for whom Parish Maps required the inclusion of 'indigenes' and 'newcomers' alike, and the prospect of producing a conventional, standardised map was a cause of disappointment.

Common Ground's 'gentle' approach to Parish Maps offers a stark contrast to the forceful and argumentative environmentalism of the 1980s, as well as to more recent 'guided localism' in policy-led interventions (Stanton 2014). Yet its consequence was a variable legacy, as their

aspirations for the initiative were differently interpreted by communities, set against a wider economic and socio-cultural context of conventional beliefs about mapping, the aesthetics of rurality and the commodification of place. This was also reflected in negotiations regarding who had the expertise to participate in parish mapping, how and to what extent, thus materializing distinct types of participation, from more participatory to more passive (McCall and Minang 2005). The mapping process was often fraught with tensions as community groups attempted to negotiate between divergent and conflicting aspirations to celebrate what was locally distinctive, faithfully record local features and produce a 'pretty' map that could be sold to raise funds for subsequent endeavors.

The interviewees suggested that the initiative was successful in drawing on local interests, knowledge and skills; and that it sought to involve and create solidarity between different sectors of the community, mindful of difference between residents in a cultural context that was judged to threaten social cohesion. The use to which maps were put also raise questions about the relation between local and non-local, most notably regarding the use of maps to articulate attachments and belonging in response to development and land-use planning procedures. Importantly, Parish Maps suggest that more than a 'true' expression of what these communities were (for some of their inhabitants at a certain point in time), they were political, being used to put forward, define and contest specific identities and interests – while inevitably leaving others aside. In this vein, we might say that Parish Maps are a significant instrument of bottom-up, grassroots identity politics.

Common Ground's distinctively 'gentle' approach (Crouch and Matless, 1996) also suggests inherent limitations. Not only is the process open to conservative appropriations of place-based identity, but the agency both of communities and of the maps themselves was sometimes exaggerated, leading to disappointment when cared for sites were erased by development, despite their presence on the map. The after-lives of maps that failed in, or were failed by, land use planning disputes indicate the as yet unresolved challenge of finding ways to realise the value or rationality of local, creative and affect-laden interventions in wider policy and planning decision-making (Drenthen 2010).

In conclusion, Parish Maps can be said to represent a 'positive parochialism' that resonates with Kavanagh's self-confident articulation of the validity of the parish, which offers a sense of confidence in the local that is open without necessarily adopting a prescribed relation to what is beyond its borders (Stafford 2010). In approach if not always in practice, Common Ground's vision for Parish Maps aspired to be subversive and inclusive, confounding the skeptical presumptions

characteristic of recent geographical critiques of local belonging. It would be a mistake to dismiss Parish Maps because it failed to achieve recognition in the planning process. The emphasis on self-mobilization and on stimulating both affect and activity around and beyond the making of the map are far from incompatible with the planning process. A 'positive parochialism' supplemented by greater openness to creative and informal approaches to localism might well address the apparent incompatibility of the 'ethic of the particular' (Drenthen, 2010) and the bureaucratic and legalistic techniques of land-use planning.

Endnotes

1. Labour's 'New Deal for Communities' set out to stimulate regeneration and change in a number of 'deprived neighbourhoods' in England in such a way as to 'place the community 'at the heart of' the initiative.' (Batty et al. 2010: 5) However, an assessment of the participatory potential of the initiative has argued that disappointingly it was 'community-led in the sense that government decides how the community will be involved, why they will be involved, what they will do and how they will do it.' (Wright et al. 2010: 347)
2. Even if it should be noted that it is important to consider environmental justice in a relational manner, not only at the local level but also at national and global levels – as creating justice locally might create injustice globally (see Batel and Devine-Wright 2017, for an example and discussion; also Walker 2009).
3. For the Copthorne and Calverton cases, each interview involved two participants actively involved in the local Parish Maps project.

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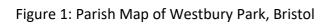**Ward C** 1973 *Anarchy in Action*. London, George Allen and Unwin.

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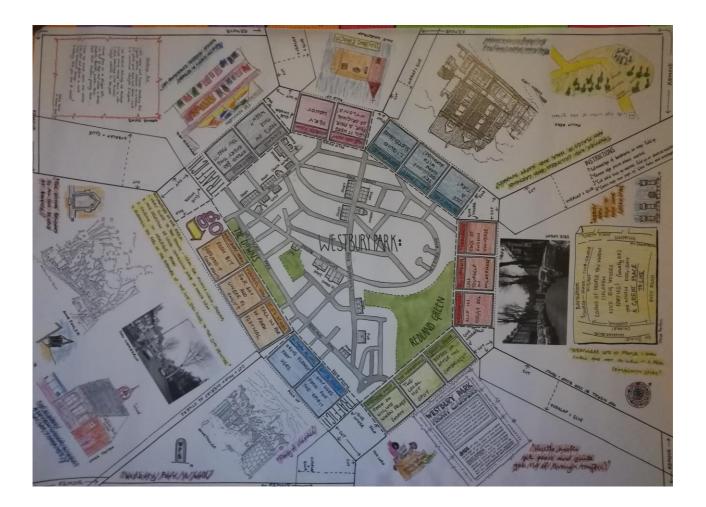
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Figure 1: Parish Map of Westbury Park, Bristol

Figure 2: Parish Map of Copthorne, Devon