

Living through gentrification: subjective experiences of local, non-gentrifying residents in Leith, Edinburgh

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Received: 11 December 2007 / Accepted: 21 April 2009 / Published online: 9 May 2009
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Abstract The process of gentrification is often seen as having winners and losers; the debate frequently is centred on the gentrifiers and those being displaced by them. However, the process appears to be more complex, and in many gentrifying neighbourhoods, there are residents who do not fit into these categories. This paper explores the subjective experiences of those who have lived through the process of gentrification. By using interviews with local residents in a gentrifying neighbourhood in Edinburgh, Scotland, a new viewpoint has been uncovered that found residents who were simultaneously embracing of and cautious about the rapid changes taking place in their gentrifying community. This paper examines three elements: housing, amenities and social interactions, and how local residents, who are not incoming gentrifiers, perceive these changes in their neighbourhood. While many residents welcomed some of the changes, there also appeared to be a ‘not for us’ sentiment. This research sheds new light on an important element of the population involved in the process, and suggests that gentrification is more complex and nuanced than often portrayed.

Keywords Edinburgh · Gentrification · Neighbourhood change · Social interactions · Subjective experiences · Waterfront redevelopment

1 Introduction

Gentrification is a politically loaded word (Davidson and Lees 2005). As such, it evokes strong feelings from a variety of different parties. To some, it represents the saviour for decaying urban neighbourhoods. However, for many others, it is seen as a ‘dirty’ word, associated with displacement and class conflict (Smith 1996). In this way, much of the academic literature portrays gentrification in very ‘black-and-white’ terms (Atkinson 2002).

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Gentrification has been broadly accepted as moving beyond its original definitions, as first noted by Glass (1964) where: “one by one many of the working class quarters of London have been invaded by the middle class...and have become elegant, expensive residences”. In the more than 40 years since the term was first coined, the nature and economy of cities has changed dramatically. Gentrification is primarily an upward class transformation and the creation of affluent space. As a result, it is seen by many scholars to include not only the upgrading of traditional working class housing, but also new-build projects geared to higher-income groups, on formerly industrial or waterfront lands, or more marginal areas further from the city centre (Slater 2006; Davidson and Lees 2005; Hackworth and Smith 2001; Smith 1996).

Without question, gentrification has a profound impact on people. Most studies focusing on individuals and households have concentrated on the choices, satisfactions and habits of the gentrifiers (Bridge 2007; Butler 2003; Butler and Robson 2003; Hamnett 2003; Ley 1980, 2003; Tallon and Bromley 2004). Fewer studies, partly owing to the difficulty in tracking them down, focus on those displaced (Atkinson 2000b; Freeman and Braconi 2004; Lyons 1996; Slater 2006).

However, many residents impacted by gentrification do not fit into either of these two categories. Even though displacement is inherent to the gentrification process (Atkinson 2000a; Bailey and Robertson 1997; Glass 1964), there are some local residents, those living in a neighbourhood before it gentrifies, who do not immediately become displaced or are able to resist displacement. What about those residents who, for whatever reason, have been able to stay put in their neighbourhoods? This is one segment of the population directly impacted by gentrification that academic research has largely overlooked. They often get ignored in debates that divide the process into ‘winners’ and ‘losers’. The experiences, expectations, perceptions and anxieties of these groups have yet to be fully developed in the voluminous literature on gentrification.

Some of the previous empirical work that does exist focuses on the conflicts between local residents and new gentrifiers (Spain 1993; Smith 2002; Butler 2003), or on local resistance and organised opposition to gentrification (Robinson 1995; Wilson et al. 2004). Other studies have suggested that local residents could benefit from gentrification by an improving neighbourhood quality, better access to services or resources, or more local amenities (Freeman and Braconi 2004; Freeman 2006; Vigdor 2002). However, more empirical evidence is needed to understand the viewpoints of ordinary residents.

This paper will examine the theories as to how gentrification can impact local groups. It will be primarily concerned with hearing directly from these residents on how they perceive the process to be impacting them and their community. This paper seeks to fill this gap by highlighting the subjective experiences of local residents, by using qualitative interviews to better understand how they feel impacted by gentrification. Leith, a rapidly gentrifying neighbourhood in Edinburgh, Scotland, has been selected as the case study for this paper. The main research question therefore is: what are the subjective experiences of local residents living through gentrification with regards to three areas: housing, shops and amenities, and social interactions?

The remainder of the paper is divided into several subsections. Section 2 will review and analyse the literature that deals with this segment of the gentrification debate. Section 3 will explain the methodology used. Section 4 will illustrate some of the changes that have occurred in Leith over the past two decades, largely through the viewpoints of residents and key actors in the community. Sections 5, 6 and 7 will provide analysis of the empirical research, with reference to the three topics. The final section will offer some concluding remarks and relate this study to existing knowledge on gentrification.

2 The consequences of gentrification

There is a considerable academic literature on how gentrification affects low-income residents in gentrifying neighbourhoods (Atkinson 2002; Bailey and Robertson 1997; Lyons 1996; Marcuse 1986; Robinson 1995; Vigdor 2002). Atkinson (2002) has provided a thorough review of the empirical literature. He found that the overwhelming majority of studies pointed to a negative impact, citing displacement, community conflict, loss of affordable housing and homelessness as the major such outcomes. Fewer studies focus on the positive side of gentrification; the main areas of research examined in these include the renewal of the physical fabric of communities, local service improvements and poverty deconcentration. The remainder of this section will examine the potential impact of gentrification on local residents with regard to the three key issues featured in this paper: housing, amenities and services, and social interactions.

2.1 Housing and displacement

Displacement is a major theme related to housing and gentrification. Marcuse (1986) outlined four ways by which lower-income populations could be removed from their homes: (1) direct, when a resident is forced out of a home; (2) exclusionary, occurring when higher prices have made it prohibitive to move into a neighbourhood; (3) chain, when successive chains of households move out of the same unit as it becomes upgraded beyond their reach; and (4) displacement pressure, when the threat of displacement looms over the heads of residents as they witness their former neighbours moving away.

Many lower-income residents express negative sentiments towards the gentrification process because of their fear of displacement (Atkinson 2000b). In his study of central London, Atkinson noted that many lower-income residents saw rental increases as being inevitable, and they often exhibited a fatalistic view about being displaced. Even when displacement is not widespread, the *fear* of being displaced, Marcuse's displacement pressure, can cast a spectre in the minds of many lower-income residents, who hear of stories of friends, neighbours or people like them, who have been displaced (Freeman 2006). In other words, a person need not be physically displaced in order to feel negatively towards it; the possibility of being displaced, as evident by witnessing friends and neighbours leaving, as well as constant media reports, can be enough to sour one's attitudes to the process.

On the other hand, some literature suggests that lower-income or local residents can benefit from gentrification in their neighbourhood. If such residents are homeowners, they can stand to benefit financially from seeing their properties increase in value significantly as their neighbourhood goes upmarket (see Bridge 1994; Freeman 2006; Newman and Wily 2006). This is, of course, a very contentious issue; rising house prices may benefit those owning property, but will further exacerbate the differences between rich and poor and make it more difficult for residents to gain a foothold on the property ladder.

Some residents, in fact, will be protected from displacement pressures due to their housing tenure (Freeman and Braconi 2004). For example, living in public housing can help keep low-income residents in gentrifying neighbourhoods because they are protected from rising house prices and displacement.

Displacement is less of a direct issue in new-build, or post-recession gentrification. Many authors (Davidson and Lees 2005; Smith 1996), however, argue that developments such as high-end projects, situated along waterfronts or old industrial land, represent gentrification because of the ensuing upward class transformation, even though there is no

direct displacement of a local population. This has been noted by some scholars as being part of a government strategy to bring affluent residents into deprived older neighbourhoods. But displacement can still occur if the new-build projects serve as a catalyst for gentrifying the adjacent, older neighbourhoods (Davidson and Lees 2005). This type of gentrification will play a prominent role in the case study featured later in this research.

The aim in this paper is not to argue whether or not gentrification is inherently good or bad, but rather to illustrate that by placing the debate into a context of sharply divided 'winners' and 'losers', we ignore some of the complexities and nuances of the process. As Bridge (1994, p. 32) has noted: "although displacement is an iniquitous outcome of gentrification... not all of those displaced are working class and not all working class are displaced". In this sense, the process is more complex than would initially appear; some residents may be able to benefit from their neighbourhood gentrifying, while many others clearly will not.

2.2 Services and amenities

Gentrification has the power to bring about a distinct change to the character of a neighbourhood, turning it from a decaying, run-down working-class area, to a trendy, prosperous middle-class neighbourhood in a very short time (Griffiths 1996). This means that not only housing, but also shops, services and amenities can change their character and clientele very rapidly and profoundly.

Again, there are two dominant viewpoints as to how changing retail and amenity structures impact the local community. On the one hand, gentrification is seen as having a negative impact on the local poor population. The new services, shops and amenities are built for a newer, high-income clientele who is moving into the neighbourhood. This can lead to greater polarisation within the community, as the new shops and amenities are beyond the means of many of the residents. Spatially, the process can give rise to two separate retail districts within the same neighbourhood: one middle-class, gentrified area, and one for the neighbourhood's low-income population (Butler 2003). As the gentrified population grows, the lower-income retail stores either get pushed further away, or disappear entirely.

This then leads to negative perceptions among residents. This spatial and psychological division can also lead to a sense of separation from the boom existing in their community, and a perception among lower-income local residents that new shops and services catering to wealthy gentrifiers were not for them, and not part of their community (Atkinson 2000b). In some cases, this can lead to a sense of resentment towards the new residents of the community. Atkinson (2000b), for example, highlighted a group called the Roughlers, a group of 'yuppie-haters' that gathered in pubs in Kensington, West London. However, they had to keep meeting in new places as their former pubs went upmarket in the face of the gentrification wave.

The other argument sees the gentrification of retail areas as being inclusive, and benefiting all local residents, regardless of their socioeconomic background. Freeman (2006) and Freeman and Braconi (2004) argue that the new stores that open as a result of gentrification can come to be appreciated by lower-income residents. In some poor neighbourhoods, access to basic shops and services can be quite limited. Part of this builds on Wrigley's (2002) argument that many low-income areas are so-called 'food deserts'. In such neighbourhoods, inhabitants have access to fewer healthy, or fresh food options than their counterparts in more affluent areas. If gentrification brings these basic amenities into neighbourhoods, this can be seen as a benefit to all residents. In addition to food stores,

Freeman (2006) argues that many poor areas, particularly in US cities, lack basic retail facilities, such as drug stores, or video rental shops; if these areas were to gentrify, the arrival of such services could bring more retail opportunities to the neighbourhood. In addition, these new stores can bring about new job opportunities for residents within the neighbourhood (Vigdor 2002).

However, a critique of this argument, as Freeman notes himself, is that these empirical studies must be placed in context. Freeman examined two acutely deprived neighbourhoods in New York City, which have now been undergoing a process of gentrification (with the associated change in retail services). That level of deprivation and disinvestment has not been the case in every neighbourhood now undergoing gentrification, and his two neighbourhoods experienced far greater levels of dislocation from mainstream circuits of capital and investment than the case presented in this paper. Another counterpoint to the argument of better amenities is that the new stores and services that arrive when a neighbourhood gentrifies can be beyond the financial means or cater to different tastes and preferences than those of any low-income residents who are able to resist displacement pressures. So while the new amenities may bring a new character to the area, this can lead to resentment if some residents feel they are not for them.

2.3 Social cohesion and interactions

Kearns and Forrest (2000) outline five elements of social cohesion, three of which—social networks, values and norms, and place attachment—have relevance at the neighbourhood level (Dekker and Bolt 2005). While the literature on housing and services supports both positive and negative impacts of gentrification, most studies relating to interactions between gentrifiers and local residents point towards negative and divisive impacts.

Many working-class communities have a strong sense of social cohesion and can be associated with strong, local, social networks (Atkinson and Kintrea 2000). However, when gentrification occurs, these ties can be weakened. As a consequence, those who survive displacement pressures and are able to remain in their community may be at a loss because much of the community that built these networks will have been displaced (Newman and Wyly 2006). The original character of the neighbourhood, as determined by demographic composition, amenities, commercial establishments and local institutions could also be lost as gentrification progresses (Vigdor 2002).

This change in social networks can also have an influence on differing, and potentially conflicting, values and norms. One outcome noted has been the emergence of strong feelings of resentment on the part of many local residents (Atkinson 2000b; Butler 2003; Freeman 2006). This can be caused not only by the changes in housing and services that come about in the wake of gentrification, but also by differing values between the groups (Freeman 2006). Freeman, for example, cited differences over what is considered to be 'acceptable' behaviour and activities, such as barbeques in the park or drinking a beer in front of one's house. Such activities may have been normal and accepted by the lower-income community, but have now become offensive to the new gentrifiers, who may not be used to, or prone to, such behaviours. This can cause tensions between the gentrifiers and the local population.

Finally, place attachment can be altered in a gentrifying neighbourhood, as different groups have different ideas over the future, or the identity of the community (Freeman 2006; Spain 1993). Spain's (1993) work in Philadelphia showed that conflicts arose between local residents and gentrifiers over the idea of what the neighbourhood should feel like. The local residents felt that they had created the neighbourhood character that was

attracting affluent residents, yet they now felt their community was becoming a playground for the rich. In addition to these individual responses, many studies highlight local community organisations that respond to gentrification, with their aim to stem or divert the process away from *their* neighbourhood (Robinson 1995; Smith 2002; Wilson et al. 2004).

The existing literature suggests a negative impact for local residents witnessing gentrification in their neighbourhood. Indeed, there is little evidence to suggest that gentrification leads to a greater sense of cohesion in neighbourhoods. It is seen by many scholars to be a divisive and disruptive process for local communities. Evidence related to housing and services, on the other hand, is more mixed; while the majority points to negative impacts for these groups, there are some studies that suggest that positive outcomes for lower-income groups are possible. This paper will now turn to what the residents themselves actually think about this process in an attempt to provide some empirical evidence for these ideas.

3 Methodology

The main source of information for this qualitative study came from interviews with local residents in the Edinburgh neighbourhood of Leith. Leith was selected as a neighbourhood because it is rapidly gentrifying, and as a result, both housing and the retail structure of the neighbourhood have been radically altered. The area is gentrifying, and the process is not yet complete, as it is in other neighbourhoods such as nearby Stockbridge. This means that there is still a large group of residents who have lived through the changes in the community.

The main source of information for this paper was a series of interviews conducted with ordinary Leith residents. Rather than aiming for a statistical representation of the entire neighbourhood population, which would have included both gentrifiers and non-gentrifiers, the aim of this research was to concentrate on the non-gentrifying segment of the population. Because of this, the area selected in which to conduct the interviews was the traditional heart of Leith, the Kirkgate at the Foot of Leith Walk. This was the historical heart of the neighbourhood and was therefore a logical spot to conduct the interviews. Today, in addition to being one of the two major shopping areas in Leith, it still plays a central role in the community; it is a transport hub for several bus lines, and remains the social, economic, cultural and spiritual focal point of Leith. Interviews were conducted by the author in January and February 2006. They were conducted during the afternoon and evening to try to obtain a variety of respondents. The spatial division of retail and other amenities is not unique to Leith; Butler (2003) noted that in Islington, North London, a similar division occurred between gentrified and ungentrified shopping districts. It was hoped that by conducting interviews in this way, the author could focus on the target segment of the local population, rather than also including newer gentrifiers.

The interviews were open-ended, concentrating on the three major themes mentioned above. Many questions probed respondents' feelings towards certain changes, as well as how they impacted on them, and the wider community. After the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed and analysed. Transcribing helped to give a greater degree of accuracy in capturing general themes and feelings, especially since the exact words of local residents were important for understanding their perceptions of the changes. The remainder of the paper uses many such direct quotes. In total there were 42 in-depth interviews. Approximately one-third of those who were asked agreed to be interviewed, with non-respondents citing time constraints as the major reason they were unable to participate.

All of the respondents lived in the community, though the length of time varied from a few years to their entire lives. Twenty were male and 22 were female. Their occupations varied from unemployed (and formerly homeless) to teachers, archaeologists and retired industrial workers. With reference to how this sample fits with an overall profile of the neighbourhood, young mothers or families with children were slightly underrepresented, as was the area's growing immigrant Polish community. There was also a slight overrepresentation of older respondents.

Potential interviewees were approached by asking them if 'they had a few minutes to talk about Leith'. This, and a small tape recorder, helped the interviewer appear less like a market researcher, which several respondents noted was one of the reasons why they stopped. The text from these interviews has been extensively utilised in the paper, and appears word for word including any local accent or slang, as stated by the respondents. Where applicable, synonyms for local slang have been added in square brackets.

A second type of interview was conducted with key informants. They included two local city councillors, a member of staff at the Port of Leith Housing Association (POLHA), which runs a network of affordable housing units in Leith, a local pub owner, and several estate agents and property developers. These interviews dealt with the above-mentioned topics, but also delved further into the respondents' areas of expertise to gain a broader sense of many of the changes. These persons were selected based on their knowledge of the recent history and development of the neighbourhood, as well as their involvement within the local community.

4 Leith: a gentrifying neighbourhood

This research was carried out in Leith, a neighbourhood in the north of Edinburgh, situated on the Firth of Forth. Gentrification began in the 1980s, with the beginnings of the transformation around the waterfront and some of the traditional tenement houses akin to Ruth Glass' original definition of the process. Over the past 10 years, this has intensified and since 2000 it has been joined with post-recession new-build gentrification in the former port areas (Davidson and Lees 2005; Hackworth and Smith 2001). This phase includes not only luxury flats, but a new shopping centre, Ocean Terminal, located on the waterfront. Ocean Terminal, and the upscale restaurants and bars around The Shore, have led to a large scale transformation of the area's retail and amenity structure, as well as its image within the city. The current gentrification in Leith fits the four criteria for third-wave gentrification outlined by Hackworth and Smith (2001). First, Leith is situated further from the city centre of Edinburgh than other gentrified parts of the city; second, large national developers are active in the process, particularly on infill sites and in the former harbour; third, as the empirical sections of this paper will show, there is little local resistance to the changes; and finally, the state is involved in much of the regeneration.

Until the 1920s, Leith was a separate municipality from Edinburgh. Historically it was the port of Edinburgh. For much of the twentieth century, maritime and industrial activities constituted the major employers in the neighbourhood. They were situated primarily along the waterfront; however, most have been closed down since World War II, and it is expected that the remaining industrial lands will become new housing in the coming decade.

With the post-war industrial decline came changes in the neighbourhood's housing. Up to this point, the main form of housing in Leith was the tenement. These three- or four-storey buildings featured a communal stairwell, with two or more flats on each landing,

communal toilets and each unit consisting of one or two rooms. During the 1960s and 1970s, much of the population living in the most overcrowded and rundown tenements was either moved to new estates on the periphery of Edinburgh, or to new high-rise buildings being erected in their place within Leith. The population declined by half in some areas during this time. A staff member of the POLHA, a not-for-profit organisation that is the main provider of affordable housing in Leith, described the situation at this time:

There was a migration out of the city, lots of streets were demolished and those that stayed were the ones that couldn't move to the new towns... The policy at the time was let's build new housing out where people want to live, with a garden and 3 bedroom houses...those that could leave did...So the people that were left behind were people who were older, poorer, less able and less mobile.

The 1970s and early 1980s were the economic low point for the community. He went on to explain that:

Property in Leith was not an asset it was a liability. It is hard to get your head around that because of the prices today [2006] are £110,000 for a one-bed in a traditional tenement. But in that time, the property wasn't seen that way...There were plenty of properties lying empty, some were becoming derelict.

However, it was not just in the housing sector where problems were severe. The neighbourhood had gained a reputation for being an unsafe area, partly due to the growing role of drugs (which entered Edinburgh through the Port of Leith) and prostitution. A local pub owner described the situation when she arrived in the mid-1980s:

When I first came here, immediately behind me the [whiskey] bond was razed to the ground and was left derelict for some time, as waste land. Down the street opposite, that was also derelict waste ground...Some other properties on the street were also derelict as well...I remember the summer of 84-85 there was a double spread in the [*Edinburgh Evening News*] of how Leith had the highest incidence of HIV positive, and I thought that was quite detrimental to Leith...There was a lot of unpleasantness here, people being mugged, and robberies etc.

Beginning in the late 1980s, the economic and social fortunes of the community began to change albeit slowly at first. Many of the warehouses were being converted to offices, or other post-industrial uses, and the old 'spit and sawdust' working-class, sailors pubs along The Shore, the road along the waterfront, were slowly moving more upmarket.

The transformation of the port was strengthened by the arrival of Scottish executive offices, and a major tourist attraction, the *Royal Yacht Britannia*, the former yacht for the British royal family. Since its arrival in the late 1990s, it has become one of Edinburgh's major tourist draws. The difference from the previous decade was quite profound; while today Leith is on many tourists' itineraries, a 1985 article in *The Scotsman* stated that: "Ask a Leither if there are tourists in Leith and he'll think you are daft" (A Tide Turns 1985).

The area's retail structure has also changed, with the biggest addition coming in 2001 with the opening of the Ocean Terminal shopping centre. It is situated on former industrial port lands, around 1 km from the traditional shopping district in Leith. The waterfront developments are part of the overall gentrification of Leith, as they are creating affluent space and represent an upward class transformation from an old industrial site, to a consumption-based, and high-end residential space. According to a local city councillor, the Ocean Terminal facility was built to attract a higher-income segment of the population, who were expected to arrive with the changes in housing.

As gentrification has progressed, there have been major changes in the housing sector. Older tenements, which now have private toilets and central heating, are selling for more than £100,000, which in many cases represents a 100% increase over 5 years. In addition, much of the old industrial and port land is being turned over to new housing units. While some of this is affordable housing, the majority is market-driven and geared to middle- and upper-income households. According to one estimate, when the remaining port activity ends, 18,000 homes will be built in its place, representing the largest single development in Edinburgh's history (Port of Leith).

These changes have impacted the image of Leith. Promotional literature for a new housing development called *Love Leith* contains statements such as: "If you love being at the centre of everything, read on. Leith is the social heart of Edinburgh", and "On the fringe of the city centre and uncompromisingly cool, Leith holds its own, day and night" (Strathclyde Homes). This image has been deliberately crafted to attract new, affluent residents to the neighbourhood. This same marketing strategy would not have been possible in Leith during the 1970s or 1980s.

However, the community remains economically, socially and in some cases physically divided; there are still pockets of poverty and deprivation, particularly on some of the housing estates. But many such estates are situated side-by-side with new luxury developments such as *Love Leith*. Statistics from the Harbour Ward, one of the three council wards in Leith, paint a sharp picture when compared with average figures for all of Edinburgh. The Harbour Ward had above-average incidences of crime; for example, there were 61% more crimes involving fire, reckless conduct and vandalism. Births to teenage mothers aged 15–19 were 97% above the city average. Unemployment among young adults (16–24) was 7.4%, which was 85% over the city average (Harbour Ward 21 Profile, 2003). One interesting facet of the local housing market is the strong social-rented sector. While council house tenure is similar to the city's average (10.6–10.9% for Edinburgh), other social rented housing, such as housing associations, are far more prominent in Leith (13.5% compared to 5.5% for the city). This would suggest that there are a large number of residents who live in housing which is not directly affected by displacement. However, this is a segment of population that often gets ignored in the gentrification debate, and only serves to underscore the nuances and complexities which exist in gentrifying neighbourhoods.

This brief overview of the neighbourhood suggests that it is currently in a state of transition; Leith maintains a mixed population. Gentrification has been ongoing for around two decades, yet remains incomplete; there are still pockets of poverty and deprivation, as well as stable, ungentrified groups as well. This is despite an acceleration of the process since the turn of the century.

5 Housing and displacement

Based on the majority of existing literature on gentrification, one would expect to see a negative response among interviewees, citing the affordability problems, as well as a fear of displacement. Residents interviewed in this study had decidedly mixed views; while there were genuine concerns about price and indirect displacement, particularly for young people trying to get on the property ladder, other responses were more positive and optimistic, citing that their neighbourhood was changing for the better. Many also noted that some of the negative impacts were not unique to Leith.

The increases in house prices were major concerns among many residents, especially those from less-affluent backgrounds. There was a general sense among the lower-income

residents that the “working class cannot afford the prices for the flats, cause they’re too expensive”. Making reference to the housing issues being faced by his own son, one retired resident stated: “for a young man, he cannae [cannot] buy. He can only rent because...what they’ve done is they’ve priced the Leithers out of Leith. It is a big problem more for the young people”. This was a sentiment noted by many residents.

There was also a sense that the new housing being constructed was not for local people. A curator at a local maritime museum summed up this viewpoint: “I don’t know who’s supposed to be living in the new houses, because they are very expensive. Local people couldn’t move from here into one of these new houses”.

In addition to concerns about price, there was also the feeling among some residents that they would be displaced. While none of the respondents cited direct displacement as being a large problem for them, indirect pressures, particularly switching from rented to owned accommodation, or upgrading to a larger property, were seen as a reason why they might be forced to leave Leith. One woman, working as a school learning assistant in the community, stated:

For people that come from Leith, the ordinary working people, they have to move out of Leith, because it’s new people that are moving into Leith; it’s nae [not] the traditional people that were born and brought up in Leith, like my own parents. They’ve got their families up here, and they live here; it’s no like that...I know quite a lot of people that have had their families and need a bigger house, they are living in a tenement, and they just cannot afford to buy a house with a garden, so they’ve got to move out of this place. To another neighbourhood.

These housing issues noted above have led to some resentment in the community, as noted by a local city councillor:

There has been a resentment, and I picked that up in my election campaign in 2003. People were thinking ‘the new housing wasn’t for us’ and ‘it’s not even for the children of us,’ defining us as the local definition of a Leither. And I can understand that because it is quite a difference. There is a difference in lifestyle, education and probably access to employment opportunities. One of the most interesting things is that my ward is the 5th most deprived in the city, so that’s partly why it does feel like that.

However, despite these concerns, there were many residents who were optimistic and positive about the changes. To some, changes in Leith were not unique, and reflected broader changes in society: “prices are something we’ve got used to...people get used to it. The house prices have gone up, but so have wages and salaries”.

There was an element of acceptance towards the changes in housing. The same respondent who earlier noted that his son could no longer afford to buy property in Leith stated:

When you look at some of the old tenements and look at the likes of that (pointing to a 1960s council tower block) and you look at what they’re building now. Ok, no doubt a lot of people cannae [cannot] afford them but it’s a better class of housing... So definitely they’ve improved the housing. [Interviewer: Even if some Leithers can’t afford it?] That was always going to be the case. There’s communities in Scotland where they’ve priced the locals out of the market.

Part of this feeling is reflected in the fact that many residents saw that the improved housing and subsequent changes were bringing about a better environment. Many noted,

with some pride, that Leith was becoming a desirable place to live. Some respondents linked the better housing to a better neighbourhood reputation. A local primary school teacher noted that:

It brings people to Leith that wouldn't normally come to Leith and it brings a balance to the types of people that are living here...Well, when I came here, Leith was a really, really run down area that no one would ever want to live in given any choice...Whereas now, people would choose to.

With regards to housing, there were genuine concerns regarding price and affordability for local people, particularly for those wishing to move up the property ladder. This did manifest itself in some feelings of resentment towards the changes. On the other hand, better housing was welcomed as bringing improvements to the neighbourhood. There appears to be little imminent displacement fears amongst residents, and those expressing a sense that they would have to leave Leith stated so because they would need to upgrade to a bigger property. However, there was a sense of being slightly removed from the boom, a feeling also seen in other studies (see Atkinson 2000b). It is clear that while many residents found the housing changes nice, particularly the new-build units, there was a deep sense that they were not for the local, particularly lower-income population.

6 Retail and amenity change

The arrival of new stores, restaurants and services was one positive element that many respondents mentioned. This relates to arguments made by Freeman (2006) and Wrigley (2002) as Leith had a lack of good, high-quality shops and amenities. One of the most favourable elements was that there were now more choices in Leith for shops, restaurants and pubs. While many of these were upmarket, many local residents made positive comments towards them. For many, this meant that they did not need to go into Edinburgh city centre to visit such places. As one retail store manager, who had lived in Leith for 25 years stated: "we now live, work and leisure in Leith, which is nice. [10 years ago] you would always go up the town, to Edinburgh [city centre]". In addition to the restaurants, the new stores have also kept residents spending their money in Leith. As one female, middle-aged life-long Leith resident stated, with reference to Ocean Terminal: "it's quite good because since it's opened it's got more shops and I do go there rather than go up to Princes street [the main Edinburgh shopping street]...it's got most of the shops up on Princes street".

Another element of change that many residents noted was that the new amenities were not only enhancing the image of the area, but also bringing new people to Leith to visit and go out. This is best represented by the changes along The Shore, a small road near the harbour once lined with dockworkers pubs, which has seen the opening of many high-end restaurants and bars in recent years. This has attracted a younger, more affluent crowd to Leith, who eat and drink along The Shore. To quote one female resident, who had lived in the area for 22 years:

I think it [The Shore] was thought of a place where you didn't really go into, and [if you] didn't come from Leith you didn't go into Leith, you know, young people at night and that. But now that's changed; people will come into Leith and there's not so much trouble.

This quote is in a similar vein to some of the perceptions towards the changing housing landscape in the area. These changes have served to alter the character and perception of

the neighbourhood, as well as its place within Edinburgh. Local residents also took pride in the fact that their community was becoming a destination, as noted by one female respondent: “Leith used to be working man’s pubs and now people actually come for a night out in Leith. That was never known; it was only people who lived in Leith, and that is now really good”.

Another area many residents spoke highly about was the changing image that their community has seen as a result of these developments. One woman, who had lived in the neighbourhood for more than 30 years, stated that: “if you told people you lived in Leith, they would say ‘oh my God’, but they don’t do that now because it’s an up-and-coming area”. A local publican, who had worked and lived in Leith since 1984, likened The Shore now to “a wee [little] bit of Paris! Like the left bank in Paris”.

This feeling of improvement was also noted by older, longer-standing residents too. One woman, a lifelong resident, who lived in a council-owned building, noted that the area was becoming more “respected” after a long period of decline. And a cook at a local school, who had lived in Leith for 20 years, furthered this sentiment:

It’s not like [the film] *Trainspotting*, you ken [know]. You get folk with that idea that Leith is like that from the early 80s. It’s definitely changed for the better...You get all these new houses, Ocean Terminal, they wouldn’t have built that years ago...it’s a lot better than it was.

In this case, it was not so much what new services were offered to residents in Leith, but the improving image that has come about as a result of these new services.

However, just as with housing, the issue of price was also a concern for some residents when it came to the new restaurants and pubs. As one woman, who lived in a council flat, noted: “To go for a meal, for the two of you, to go out it might cost you 50–60 pounds and that’s being serious. What an expense...I couldn’t afford to go down to The Shore. I honestly couldn’t, it’s just too expensive”.

Price is an important factor in the new amenities, which restricts their use by many lower-income residents. And it is reflected in residents’ perceptions towards the new shops and services. Some new amenities, such as Ocean Terminal, are used by a variety of residents, gentrifiers and non-gentrifiers, local and non-locals alike. Others, however, such as the expensive bars and restaurants along The Shore, have a more upmarket clientele. While all these changes contribute to an enhanced image of Leith, something appreciated by local residents, as the last quotation illustrates, many of the new amenities are not really used by them and are intended for outsiders. Therefore, despite the optimism which has come about as a result of better amenities and services (and its associated reputation enhancement), there is a sense that many of these changes, while nice, are intended for “other people”.

7 Social interactions

Gentrifying neighbourhoods are often portrayed as being in conflict, creating tension between longer-standing residents and newly arrived gentrifiers (Lees et al. 2008; Slater 2006; Smith 1996) The relationship between gentrification and social cohesion often has been portrayed as one that leads to further divisions within the community, culminating in a sense of resentment among lower-income, local groups (Atkinson 2000b; Freeman 2006; Spain 1993). However, in the process of interviewing Leith residents, a less antagonistic discourse was evident. Leith has many socioeconomic divisions, and residents were well

aware of this. They were also aware that with gentrification, particularly with the waterfront developments, these divisions were not decreasing. However, this did not lead to large-scale resentment towards the new residents.

The division, rather, was more of an awareness that different Leith residents lived, worked, ate, and drank in different manners and in different parts of the neighbourhood. As a local primary school teacher noted: “Yes, [there is a divide] definitely. Not division in the sense that they would not come together or that; there’s no animosity. But a division in terms of how they live their lives”. With regards to resentment, the prevailing attitude was more benign. As one life-long Leith resident stated:

I’ve personally no felt any tension but I’m no lookin’ for it, live and let live. What’s good for one is good for everybody. As Leith grows, everybody should and could be growing with it. I think it can only be for the better and for future generations. My son lives outside Leith because he couldn’t afford to live in Leith, so for my family, they are going outside of Leith and not coming in, so there’s a new generation of people coming into Leith.

Over the course of the interviews, this attitude prevailed. Residents were aware that there was a divide in their neighbourhood, but did not appear to be particularly threatened by it. One unemployed woman answered as if I was naïve to think that there was not a divide: “Hasn’t there always been? Of course there is. You are either rich or poor, there’s nae [no] in between”. What was surprising was that when asked further, she did not think it was necessarily a negative thing: “I know the waterfront is all being done up, but it’s good if it’s bringin’ money in. If it’s helping the community it’s a good thing”.

Pubs were one of the mediums respondents used to discuss the social divisions within their community. Many stated the geographic division between the traditional heart of Leith, with its local pubs and the new wine bars around The Shore, as being symbolic of the differences within the community. A local school cook stated:

Aye the new Leithers are doon [down] The Shore and the old Leithers are at your wee little pubs along Great Junction Street and that...I think there is a division. Definitely a division. You’ve those down at The Shore with the money and the wine bars...You just get on with it, I think.

This division has been evident for some time; the 1985 *Scotsman Magazine* article entitled ‘A tide turns’ about Leith’s transition noted that “they [traditional Leithers] would no more dream of setting foot in a waterfront brasserie than a neo-Leith entrepreneur would of shopping in the new Kirkgate”.

While many respondents agreed that there was a strong ‘us and them’ feeling, others did not view the divisions as being so discrete. To some residents, the idea of what type of person went to what type of pub or restaurant was more blurred. As was previously mentioned, many residents enjoyed the new, more upmarket establishments in their neighbourhood. One respondent, who had lived in the neighbourhood for more than 20 years, responded when asked about whether or not there was a strong social division:

You’ve got places like some of the workingmen’s pubs and places like the Dockers Club and that, so there probably is. There are people that would never go down to The Shore and there are people that would never go to the Dockers Club and then there’s people like me who would go to them both!

In addition to this, a local city councillor related a particularly amusing story about senior citizens from his ward. According to him, when they felt unsatisfied with quality of the

local meal service provided to them at home, they simply began to go down to the new Mark's and Spencer's Food Hall at Ocean Terminal to get high-quality lunches!

These responses show that while there clearly were divisions in the community between rich and poor, newcomers and longer-standing residents, these were not nearly as black-and-white as some residents had perceived them to be, or as were often cited in the academic literature. Furthermore, respondents felt that this division was not detrimental to the community; rather they appeared to accept it as a modern day reality.

8 Conclusions

When examining the viewpoints and perceptions of the residents interviewed in this paper, there is a striking lack of major critical remarks from the respondents. In some ways, this is not so surprising; Leith is a good example of third-wave gentrification (Hackworth and Smith 2001), which is characterised by less opposition to the process. On the surface, at least, residents have a lot to celebrate with regards to the changes in their neighbourhood. Leith has become a 'destination' largely through the gentrification of the waterfront, transforming it from a home of dockers' pubs, to classy restaurants, cafes and wine bars. This has subsequently altered the image of Leith to a more positive, successful neighbourhood; whereas a generation ago, the area was shunned by those who could avoid it, today people from all over Edinburgh aspire to live in the refurbished tenements or new waterfront flats. It is relatively easy, therefore, to understand why so many residents spoke with pride about the changes, and were optimistic about the future of the neighbourhood. This is especially true when the descriptions of what the area was like before gentrification are taken into account.

However, a more critical examination of the interviews reveals a different viewpoint. While most respondents thought the new houses, shops, amenities and image were nice, and there were no visible tensions between gentrifiers and non-gentrifiers, there was a profound sense that this boom and development was both not intended for them, nor were they the prime beneficiaries of it. The latter point was particularly relevant with regards to housing as was evident from the remarks made by the local politician who recalled a sense among his constituents that the housing was not being built for 'us', with 'us' being defined as being someone from Leith. The same was true with regards to some of the new amenities, particularly the bars and restaurants; there was a sense that they were nice because they brought people down to Leith and helped to change the image of the area, yet many lower-income residents did not frequent them very often, largely due to price. This was a similar sentiment to that found in Atkinson (2000b). Many of the changes were for an outside audience: new houses to attract gentrifiers, restaurants and bars bringing people from all over the city, and an improved image within the rest of the city. While local residents interviewed in this study could see these changes, and were positive towards them, they also realised that they were not the intended target audience of much of this transformation. They were positive about the changes in *the* neighbourhood, though more pessimistic about the changes in *their* neighbourhood. Therefore there are still questions to be asked as to whether or not they will benefit from it. And of course, if they eventually end up being displaced, any positive sentiments about the gentrification process are likely to disappear entirely.

By examining gentrification through the perspective such residents, however, it becomes clear that the process is more complex than only dealing with gentrifiers, who win out because they move into a neighbourhood and mould it into their own middle-class

fashion, and displaces, who are on the losing end because they are forced from their homes. This research has uncovered residents who clearly do not fit into either category, and their responses reflect this.

In some ways, the responses seen in this paper run counter to much of the existing empirical literature on local residents in gentrifying neighbourhoods, which highlights more active resistance to the process, as well as more open resentment (see in particular: Robinson 1995; Smith 1996; Spain 1993; Wilson et al. 2004). There are several possible explanations as to why these results have differed from other studies. The first is that with a new-build shopping centre attracting much of the focus for new investment, the traditional shopping district has remained as a focal point for the community, with most of its lower-market stores remaining open. This has prevented the entire retail sector of Leith from going completely upmarket. While this may further the social and spatial divisions between rich and poor within Leith, there is still a strong sense of community amongst the area's lower-income residents, which is spatially manifested at the Kirkgate shopping centre. The other factor is that with such a high percentage of residents living in social-rented housing, they are insulated from gentrification pressures, and may be more open to some of the benefits of their changing neighbourhood, particularly with regards to the environment, reputation or safety. Those living in social-rented housing, are insulted by some of the most negative aspects of gentrification, mainly displacement, and therefore they may feel more secure in their housing situation. Finally, Leith has always been a mixed community; it would be wrong to assume that all its residents were low-income before gentrification occurred. These points all serve to underscore the nuances of the gentrification process.

This paper aimed to add to the gentrification debate by interviewing residents of a gentrifying area who had witnessed the changes going on in their neighbourhood. Leith, a rapidly gentrifying area, albeit one with a very mixed population, served as a suitable case study for this purpose. The mixed nature and tenure of its non-gentrifying population (particularly with regards to owners, renters, and social-renters) only serves to illustrate the complexities and nuances within gentrification, which often gets compartmentalised into discrete 'winners' and 'losers'. In the end, the residents in this study had mixed views about the gentrification of their neighbourhood at its current phase. But by evaluating the sentiments and opinions of those who were neither gentrifiers nor displacees, it becomes evident that gentrification is more nuanced, particularly from the perspectives of those who have lived through it. Despite the fact that many residents were positive about some of the elements of gentrification in their neighbourhood, this should not be interpreted as a boost for gentrification; when a more critical analysis is applied to the interviews, the initial optimism clearly becomes more muted. Therefore, future studies of the gentrification process should take a more nuanced, and less 'black-and-white' approach to the evaluation of winners and losers in the transformation of inner-city neighbourhoods.

Acknowledgments The author wishes to thank Ronald van Kempen, Rob van der Vaart, Jan van Weesep, Michael Doucet and the three anonymous referees for their helpful comments and suggestions during the writing of this paper.

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