

# “Well, it ticked all the boxes”: Negotiating place and living near railways

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## Introduction

Many properties are located alongside railways, one of the more common sources of vibration in residential environments in the United Kingdom. Vibration and noise from railways have largely been researched from an annoyance perspective; often with the understanding that vibration and noise from railways is unwanted, posing a threat to quality of life (Moser, 2009). However, the relationship between people and place is also important. This paper reports on research which has explored how the relationship people have with their place of residency impacts upon their experiences and understandings of the conditions (i.e. vibration, noise, visual impacts) and features (i.e. railways) within their environments. In particular, as ‘*who we are*’ is often related to ‘*where we are*’ (Dixon & Durrheim, 2000, p. 27), this research has explored place and identity, and how railways in residential environments are constructed through and within discourse.

## Method

Ten semi-structured interviews were carried out with residents living along the West Coast Main Line in the North West of England. All participants had previously taken part in a social survey of vibration and noise annoyance. The data were analysed using a narrative-discursive approach (Taylor & Littleton, 2006).

## Results

Participants drew upon a number of interpretative repertoires and discursive strategies to negotiate, and justify, living in a place where a railway is a dominant feature. Residents negotiated living near the railway by unproblematising its presence, and situating their talk in relation to the difficulties faced when finding a suitable

place to live and the choices they had as to where they lived. Canonical narratives such as the property ladder, buying a family home, and living in a quiet and peaceful place were also drawn upon.

## Discussion

By taking a narrative-discursive approach, this research found that living near railways and the relationship residents have with place is highly complex. Railways were constructed as both problematic, and something which residents had ‘*got used to*’, and not as a problem in relation to the wider context of life and finding a ‘*decent*’ place to live. Their discursive work enabled residents to maintain a positive place identity. Such qualitative findings have potential implications for current policy and international standards on vibration and noise, which are largely focused on objective measurements and self-reported annoyance levels.

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