Immobility and insecure labour markets: An active response to precarious employment

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Abstract

This article explores how people experience and respond to a post-industrial labour market context through residential (im)mobility. Focusing on places that are represented through a range of official measures as 'declining', the research explains why people may remain in weaker labour market areas, rather than moving to places that could offer greater employment opportunities. The case study approach focused on two urban neighbourhoods in England, Nearthorpe (Sheffield) and Eastland (Grimsby). The article draws on repeated, in-depth, biographical interviews with 25 individuals across 18 households. The research shows that stability of residence was a necessary counterbalance to a low-paid and insecure work context. Immobility facilitated access to a range of informal support networks. However, immobility was not simply a by-product of lack of mobility or a passive state. This research conceptualises immobility as an active process in which participants engaged in different forms of adaptation and resistance in the face of changing labour market conditions.

摘要

本文探讨了人们如何通过居住的（不）流动性来体验和应对后工业劳动力市场环境。我们重点关注由一系列官方举措表明"正在衰落"的地方，解释了人们为什么会留在劳动力市场较弱的区域，而没有转移到可以提供更多就业机会的地方。案例研究集中于英格兰尼尔索普（谢菲尔德）和伊斯特兰（格里姆斯比）这两个城市街区。本文对 18 个家庭的 25 人进行了多次深入的人生经历访谈。研究表明，居住的稳定性是对低收入和不安全工作环境的必要制衡。不流动使这些家庭享受一系列非正式的支持网络。然而，不流动并非简单地是缺乏流动性造成的，也并非只是一种被动状态。本研究将不流动性理解为一个主动的过程，受访者面对不断变化的劳动力市场状况，展开了不同形式的调适和抵抗。

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Introduction

This article explores how people living in places that are represented as 'declining' respond to insecure labour markets through residential mobility and immobility. Various employment indicators (OECD Employment and Labour Market Statistics, 2014) point to a negative shift in the security and availability of employment, while theorists have tied long-term labour market adjustments to residential mobility, arguing that these changes require increased flexibility and mobility (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). However, the spatial dimension of worklessness (Beatty et al., 2012) suggests that significant populations remain living in post-industrial areas despite profound labour market changes, and large-scale research suggests that experiences of mobility are differentiated by employment characteristics and class (Champion and Coombes, 2007). This article explores people's experiences of insecure labour markets in two case-study areas, relating this to their (im)mobility. It responds to calls to place immobility at the centre of research (Coulter et al., 2016; Skelton, 2013), conceptualising it as an active process rather than a by-product of lack of mobility.

Official discourses have often presented populations living in more disadvantaged urban areas as immobile, with little sense of agency. Residents are trapped, or else lacking in aspiration, unwilling to engage with a modern labour market context that demands mobility between competitive urban hubs. This research addresses the question of 'why people do not move, especially when relocating may provide them with new opportunities' (Coulter and Van Ham, 2013: 1053). The focus is on those at the bottom of the 'kinetic hierarchy' (Cresswell, 2012: 651), who have seldom been the object of (im)mobility research. Classed experiences are particularly important at the intersection of (im)mobility and labour market experiences, as spatial mobility and career strategies are essential to 'the very notion of the middle-class person' (Savage et al., 1992: 33). The research presented here argues that work-related residential mobility is differentiated by class, with those orientated towards employment in the low-pay economy less likely to be mobile for work. It provides in-depth insights into why work did not feature in mobility decisions for many people living in two post-industrial urban areas, Nearthorpe (Sheffield) and Eastland (Grimsby). It further argues that immobility within existing labour market areas provides an important function for households engaged in low-paid work.

The article begins by discussing key debates around (im)mobility, insecure labour markets and class. A range of concepts situate these debates within broader constructs of social action. The research contributes to contemporary debates by focusing on experiences of immobility in urban areas, adding empirical support to conceptualisations of immobility as an active, agent-involved process. Following a discussion of the qualitative research method and a description of the case study areas and participants, the main findings are presented. These suggest that experiences of finding and keeping work in insecure labour market contexts had a significant impact on mobility. Immobility enabled participants in the low-pay economy to get by as they moved in and out of work. Rather than an opportunity, residential mobility beyond short distances threatened the informal support networks that people used to manage insecurity. However, immobility was far from a passive state. Participants demonstrated considerable flexibility in the face of changing employment contexts; it just did not manifest through flexibility of place of residence. Active processes of adaptation and resistance characterised interactions with local labour markets.

Immobility and insecurity in an age of mobility

There is now a significant body of multi-disciplinary research suggesting that residential mobility is a selective process, skewed towards the better qualified and financially better-off, and less common among manual workers, the unemployed and the economically inactive (Bailey and Livingston, 2008; Champion and Coombes, 2007; Cole et al., 2007; McCormick, 1997; Meen et al., 2005; Turok, 1999). Less attention has been given to the experiences of those who do not move and the role that work plays in mobility decisions. Immobility has been more commonly seen 'as the absence of an event (mobility) rather than as an occurrence worthy of analysis' (Hanson, 2005: 15301). This article begins to address the need for immobility to be 'taken seriously' in mobility studies (Skelton, 2013: 470), as well as for a greater focus on stillness (Cresswell, 2012) and residential immobility (Coulter et al., 2016).

Increased attention to immobility has largely focused on specific groups, exploring 'how mobile people dwell in places' (Meier and Frank, 2016: 363), presenting immobility as a temporary by-product of mobile groups being still. Hjälm (2014) highlighted the need to investigate 'staying' as a multi-layered and complex decision, but acknowledged the need to add many other voices to the analysis, which focused on older stayers in one urban neighbourhood. Clark et al. (2017) have also furthered understandings of immobility, focusing on the role of place attachment in decisions to remain. Their finding that manual workers were more likely to stay or move within existing neighbourhoods suggests a clear need to unpick class-differentiation, work and (im)mobility.

Although studies are beginning to explore the experiences of those who stay, it is important to understand how people remain in urban contexts from which mobility might be expected, framing immobility as a site of social agency. Theorists such as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) have argued that labour market changes have reshaped social relations, encouraging adaptation through mobility of occupation, place of residence and place of employment. Highlighting reductions in residential mobility, Cooke (2011: 203) challenges this '"grand narrative" of hypermobility, modernity and dislocation', linking 'residential rootedness' (Cooke, 2013: 673) to new communication technologies and increased daily travel for leisure and work. However, these conclusions are perhaps more relevant to middle-class experiences in which jobs are more adaptable to home-working using communication technologies, and long-distance commuting for work is more common. Working-class experiences of (im)mobility are likely to be significantly different due to the nature of work and social life. For those unable or unwilling to be mobile, immobility increasingly bears negative connotations of inflexibility and a non-modern attitude to employment (Schneider and Limmer, 2008: 119).

While evidence from aggregate flows suggests that residential mobility is related to employment, we do not yet have a full understanding of how work considerations feature in household mobility decisions. Coulter and Scott (2015) sought to explicitly draw out work factors in residential mobility. Yet, it has proven difficult to reconcile the 'inconsistency between the micro motives inferred from net flows and those that the migrants themselves report' (Morrison and Clark, 2011: 1948). The argument that work factors are not reported because work is so significant that it forms an essential precondition to mobility decisions (Morrison and Clark, 2011) applies less well to labour market contexts in which people frequently move in and out of low-paid work. Work may not feature in active motivations for

mobility because it has less importance in people's lives.

Increased labour market insecurity does not necessarily mean, as some theorists have argued, that the relative salience of class will decline (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Long-term unemployment remains a predominantly working-class experience (Atkinson, 2008), and these experiences play an important role in guiding social action (Bourdieu, 1990). Indeed, various theorists have highlighted class-based strategies for survival (Cumbers et al., 2010, Katz, 2004). The entrenchment of inequalities between urban areas via the agglomeration of economic activity and the movement of mobile workers into higher-wage city-regions (Martin et al., 2016) fosters discourses of 'decline' and the question: 'Why would people want to live there?' (Mah, 2009: 289). Instead of illuminating the resourcefulness of people and places in the face of such disadvantages (MacKinnon and Derickson, 2013), immobility largely signifies the failure of mobility to places of opportunity and growth.

Reconceptualising immobility as an active process enables the in-depth exploration of the range of responses that people make to changing local labour markets while remaining in situ. This positions 'staying' as a diverse and on-going phenomenon (Hjälm, 2014: 578). Although social action is associated with positions in the social structure (Bourdieu, 1990) and experiences of (im)mobility play a role in the production of future mobility behaviour (Cresswell, 2012: 642), not all social action is unconscious (Burkitt, 2004). Emphasising agency, both individual and collective, opens up understandings of immobility and challenges the dominant portrayal of the urban poor, who Cumbers et al. (2010) argue are often regarded as disempowered, trapped and lacking social agency. They suggest that, in reality, those at the sharp end of restructuring have developed various strategies.

The social bonds and obligations of lives lived relationally with others in a shared lifeworld are crucial to understanding immobility as an active process (Bottero, 2010; Coulter et al., 2016). Place-based mechanisms of support are particularly important in more disadvantaged urban areas (Batty et al., 2011; Hickman, 2010); 'everyday acts of neighbouring' (Katz, 2004: 246), informal job networks (Smith, 2005; Watt, 2003) and casual 'sidewalk life' (Jacobs, 1961: 73) counterbalance insecurity. A focus on daily life foregrounds the everyday struggles that people engage in to ensure their own social reproduction (Cumbers et al., 2010). These everyday practices of 'getting by' can underpin acts of 'reworking' or 'resistance' of the oppressive circumstances from which such practices developed (Katz, 2004). Cumbers et al. (2010: 68) argue that although restructuring may have fragmented the working-class in old industrial cities, everyday agency and resistance continue even in the most regressive economic environments. They unpick the 'complex ethics and morality' to class resistance, exploring people's lived experiences and empirically differentiating creative strategies of resilience, reworking and resistance. This reasserts the importance of understanding everyday classed experiences. The work presented here explores experiences of (im)mobility, highlighting the active strategies that people use to manage the fracturing of urban job markets.

Method

This article is based on qualitative, biographical interviews with 25 individuals across 18 households in Nearthorpe (Sheffield) and Eastland (Grimsby). To maintain anonymity, participants and neighbourhoods have been given pseudonyms. While the findings are not generalisable to all places, many issues will be relevant to settings with a similar profile. The case study neighbourhoods

were defined at Census lower layer super output area (LSOA). Potential neighbourhoods, selected with reference to common levels of disadvantage, but contrasting labour market and housing market characteristics, were compared on a range of Census data. Some neighbourhoods were excluded, for example those which were dominated by social housing, as this would have restricted experiences of (im)mobility to one tenure. While both of the selected neighbourhoods have undergone significant labour market changes and had a mixed tenure profile, there are important differences in contemporary labour market and housing market contexts. This enabled comparison of how people experienced (im)mobility in stronger versus weaker housing and employment markets.

Nearthorpe is situated in the industrial east of the city, with terraces originally built to house migrated workers in the steel industry. Well-connected to the city centre, it retains community facilities that convey a distinct sense of place despite its absorption into the city during industrial expansion. Eastland is situated near Grimsby town centre. The dock tower dominates the skyline, a lasting reminder of the fishing industry that gave rise to the area's long terraced rows and imposing villas, now largely subdivided into flats. In the mid-19th century, both areas experienced dramatic industrial expansion, Nearthorpe in steel and Eastland in fishing. Sheffield became one of the most prosperous industrial areas in the country (Pollard, 1993), while Grimsby was by the 1920s the largest and most prosperous fishing port in the world (Ekberg, 1984). The well-documented decline of manufacturing in England (Bailey and Turok, 2000; Sissons, 2011) has left a legacy of unemployment, sickness and economic inactivity with a significant spatial component, particularly concentrated in former industrial areas like Sheffield and Grimsby (Beatty et al., 2012).

Contemporary labour market experiences in Eastland and Nearthorpe reflect broader changes such as increased part-time employment, insecurity and flexibility (McDowell, 2003; Shildrick et al., 2012). Both areas score highly on indices of multiple deprivation. In comparison to Nearthorpe, Eastland had fewer people engaged in professional roles, as well as higher levels of unemployment and sickness/disability (Table 1). Whilst Sheffield's geographical location and transportation links enable commuting across labour market areas, Grimsby's labour market is relatively self-contained, with limited size and strength (One NorthEast, 2009). These city-wide differences were reflected at the neighbourhood level. Nearthorpe has strong transport links to different employment hubs across labour market areas, while Eastland residents were less likely to travel long distances for work. This may leave Eastland residents in a more precarious labour market position, facing greater pressure to relocate for employment.

Yet, it is clear that many people do not move, and when they do they move locally. The 2011 Census measures internal migration, recording people who moved address in the preceding year. Eastland was characterised by much greater mobility than Nearthorpe, and this fits with the characteristics of the sample (Table 1). In 2011, 20% of Eastland's usual resident population had changed address in the preceding year, compared to 11% in its North East Lincolnshire local authority area and 10% in Nearthorpe.[1] However, 14% of these movers remained in Eastland, and only 9% left the local authority area. This compares to 21% of movers across the local authority who moved to a different authority. Eastland was therefore characterised by high local mobility. Although Nearthorpe had a smaller proportion of movers, more of those moves were made beyond the local authority area (18%, compared to 26% in the Sheffield

Table 1. Sample characteristics.

	Nearthorpe		Eastland		Total
	N (%)	Census 2011, LSOA %	N (%)	Census 2011, LSOA %	
Gender					
Female	7 (58)	49	8 (62)	48	15
Male	5 (42)	51	5 (38)	52	10
Individual age[a]					
18–24	0	16	1 (8)	19	1
25–34	5 (42)	}47	4 (31)	}41	9
35–44	3 (25)		1 (8)		4
45–54	1 (8)	}23	4 (31)	}30	5
55–64	2 (17)		3 (23)		5
64 +	1 (8)	15	0	11	1
Individual employment status					
Unemployed	2 (17)	9	4 (31)	16	6
Employed full-time	3 (25)	21	1 (8)	30	4
Employed part-time	1 (8)	14	3 (23)	16	4
Economically inactive	6 (50)	44	5 (38)	31	11
Retired	1 (17)	9	1 (20)	6	2
Long-term sick/disabled	0	6	2 (40)	9	2
Looking after children	4 (67)	13	1 (20)	8	5
Carer	1 (17)	–	0	–	1
Other	0	6	1 (20)	4	1
Occupation (of those in employment)					
Professional	3 (75)	11	0	5	3
Associate professional	0	8	1 (25)	5	1
Clerical support	1 (25)	8	0	6	1
Caring, leisure and service	0	8	3 (75)	13	3
Industry (of those in employment)					
Accommodation and food services	0	14	1 (25)	8	1
Administrative and support services	1 (25)	10	0	6	1
Education	1 (25)	8	0	6	1
Health and social work	0	11	2 (50)	11	2
Professional, scientific and technical	2 (50)	4	0	1	2
Wholesale and retail trade	0	15	1 (25)	25	1
Household structure					
Married/cohabiting, with child(ren)	5 (56)	31	2 (22)	16	7
Married/cohabiting, no child(ren)	1 (11)	10	2 (22)	15	3
Single person, with child(ren)	1 (11)	9	2 (22)	12	3
Single person, no child(ren)	2 (22)	22	2 (22)	37	4
Shared house	0	–	1 (11)	–	1
Household tenure					
Owner occupier	6 (67)	47	3 (33)	47	9
Private rent	1 (11)	22	5 (56)	37	6
Social rent	2 (22)	28	1 (11)	16	3
Length of tenure in current home					
< 1 year	1 (11)	–	5 (56)	–	6
1–4 years	3 (33)	–	2 (22)	–	5
4–10 years	1 (11)	–	1 (11)	–	2
10–20 years	1 (11)	–	1 (11)	–	2
> 20 years	3 (33)	–	0	–	3

Notes: [a]Census data has been aggregated due to mis-aligned age categories, and is presented as percentage of usual residents over the age of 18.

local authority as a whole). Still, the majority of moves were local, with 10% remaining in Nearthorpe and 26% moving to adjoining Census tracts. Nearthorpe had similar migration to Sheffield, where 13% of the usual resident population had moved in the year preceding the Census.

This pattern is reinforced by local housing markets, with more private rented housing and low demand in Eastland. Based on house price data, both case study areas represented relatively affordable locations, with average house prices almost two-thirds lower than in the UK as a whole.[2] Eastland, however, recorded twice as many sales as Nearthorpe in 2007, and even after the recession there were around 50% more sales. This may be indicative of more local residential mobility and the transition of properties from owner occupation to private rental investments.

The case study areas provided the opportunity to compare experiences of (im)mobility in former industrial areas of high disadvantage, situated in different labour market and housing market contexts. Greater work-related mobility may have been expected from an area like Eastland, because of its relative isolation from wider labour market opportunities. However, in reality, the experiences of those at the lower end of employment markets were strikingly similar in both places. Differences in (im)mobility largely followed class lines, drawn out by the experiences of the greater proportion of professional households in Nearthorpe compared to working-class counterparts in both locations.

Whole households were interviewed twice, recognising the negotiated nature of household decision-making whilst enabling people to identify their own motivations for (im)mobility (Winstanley et al., 2002). The use of retrospective data has been criticised for creating inaccurate biographies, interpreted through the lens of the present (Coulter et al., 2016). However, biographical researchers find analytical value in the ways in which individuals move between past, present and future, providing insight into how events are perceived and placed within lives (Roberts, 2002).

Participants were recruited by a flyer which was hand-delivered to houses. In Sheffield, 500 flyers yielded 16 potential households (3.2% response rate), in which people were interested in taking part in the research after completing a phone-based screening survey. In Grimsby, 900 flyers yielded 15 households (1.7% response rate). In each area, nine households were selected to interview. Differences in response rates may have reflected higher population turnover and empty properties in Grimsby. Because of self-selection, there is potential for sampling bias. With smaller samples, it is also difficult to precisely reflect neighbourhoods, as a single case has a greater impact on the sample composition. However, despite some areas of differential representation, a heterogeneous sample was achieved (see Table 1). Participants were identified as more working-class or middle-class on the basis of a number of characteristics such as occupation and education, as well as orientations such as career strategies and pathways. Class was therefore seen as 'materially based but not determined' (Paton, 2013: 85).

Drawing a sample from a place at one point in time inevitably excludes those who have already moved. Those most likely to move for work may have already left, leaving behind only the immobile. However, the research was able to capture potential mobility by exploring moving intentions. Whilst intentions do not necessarily accurately measure behaviour (Hansen and Gottschalk, 2006), this was the best available instrument to capture possible future outmovers. Ideally, a comparative group of movers could be interviewed. However, it is very difficult, time consuming and expensive to trace people once they have left (Cole et al., 2007). Biographical methods provide some redress, as many

participants had historically been outmovers from the case study areas, although they are still a sub-set because they also returned.

Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and analysed using Nvivo software for qualitative data. Interview topics included understanding how people came to live in their current home, perceptions of the neighbourhood, experiences of local labour markets and future mobility intentions. The second interview explored (im)mobility and employment histories, constraints and motivations for (im)mobility and interactions with labour market contexts. Full interview schedules can be found in Preece (2015). Employment and housing timelines were constructed for each household, enabling biographical analysis. Each transcript was openly coded, then the list of codes was rationalised under thematic headings, before recoding. Themes were grouped under different headings relating to key research questions.

Findings

The different experiences of participants working in professional compared to low-paid roles demonstrated how and why residential mobility is differentiated by class. The insecurity experienced by those at the bottom of the labour market was such that local immobility performed an important stabilising function. Participants drew on place-based networks of knowledge and support whilst moving in and out of employment. However, this relative immobility was not the result of passive inactivity. Participants demonstrated considerable agency in negotiating changing labour markets both by adaptation and forms of resistance.

Narratives of contingency and insecurity in work

Almost all participants talked about changes in conditions of employment towards greater contingency and insecurity, whether through agency work, fixed-term contracts, not having guaranteed hours or balancing multiple jobs. However, for professionals, residential mobility to progress their career was a common experience. By contrast, for those working in less secure and lower-paid roles, work considerations rarely featured in (im)mobility decisions.

A sense of insecurity was particularly prominent in Eastland, where factory work was dominated by agencies. Many work histories showed movement between low-skilled jobs, interspersed by periods of unemployment or economic inactivity. A common refrain was 'I've done all sorts' (Sarah, Eastland, 25–34, unemployed). This suggests churning at the bottom of the labour market, and situates personal experiences within wider labour market trends (McDowell, 2003; Shildrick et al., 2012). Many participants recounted their experiences of highly flexible labour markets. James (Eastland, 25–34, unemployed) described factories 'calling people in the morning and just giving you what people had called in sick with'. Matt (Eastland, 25–34, unemployed) noted that there was an expectation of flexibility, arriving at factories to be told 'we haven't got any work for you, so I don't know why they've sent you', then facing a two-hour walk home.

Older participants like Carol (Eastland, 55–64, permanently sick/disabled) pointed out that factory work used to be 'where the money was to be earned', providing the security needed to support a family or buy a home. However, descriptions of the contemporary labour market for those working in low-paid roles highlighted the contingent nature of work. Aisha (Nearthorpe, 25–34, looking after family) noted, 'I've got qualifications, I've been to college, what job did I get? Nothing. I had to do three jobs just to live'. This persistent sense of precariousness reduced the likelihood of employment flexibility manifesting through long-distance

residential mobility, because stability of place was crucial to helping people to balance an insecure work context. Rachel described how informal lending of money and goods enabled multiple households to be supported:

> I'd love to mark a pound coin one day …'cos I'll borrow a quid off you to go and do whatever with, and then, 'oh, I owe you a quid', 'oh, well I owe that to so and so anyway, so you give that to them for me'… I know it sounds like it's just a quid, but by the end of the week that's a loaf of bread, that's a pint of milk. (Rachel, Eastland, 25–34, unemployed)

Rather than freeing people from ties to place, labour market flexibilisation could therefore have the opposite effect, increasing the importance of immobility. There was considerable value to remaining in places where you knew and were known to others, rather than risking becoming a stranger in a different urban environment. The close proximity of others 'like them' facilitated bonds of reciprocity and support. Childcare was also a significant issue with extended networks of grandparents providing valuable support without which their children 'wouldn't be able to afford to work' (Helen, Nearthorpe, 65–74, retired). Mutual support tied these households together in urban areas that could support diverse household needs and life stages.

Research was being carried out during a recession, and a number of participants working in more professional roles told stories of restructuring and job loss. Sumera (Nearthorpe, 35–44, administration employee), for example, felt 'lucky I'm still in a job, 'cos there's so many people that are losing jobs'. This reflected broader trends towards casualisation of employment across the employment spectrum (Shildrick et al., 2012). There was, therefore, some evidence that the threat of downward social mobility was present for many groups, not merely those at the bottom of the employment ladder (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002).

Participants repeatedly referred to the fear of losing their job as a factor in accepting poorer conditions of employment.

However, those working in professional roles still experienced comparative stability, with contracts enabling a more planned approach to work. For participants like Zahir (Nearthorpe, 35–44, Local Authority employee), the insecurity associated with fixed-term contracts was also compensated for by a sense of progress along a career ladder. Yasmin (Nearthorpe, 25–34, looking after family) also talked about making the 'sacrifice' of moving if it would help the household achieve the strategic aim of stability and a stronger career position. This provides explanatory power to studies that have highlighted differences in residential mobility on the basis of employment characteristics (Champion and Coombes, 2007).

Those operating in the low-pay economy were less able to off-set compromises against strategic gains. Instead, households redefined notions of security. Sarah (Eastland) argued that 'work is so scarce … that six months does feel like it's secure'. Sarah and Matt adjusted perceptions of security in response to the local, seasonal labour market, with six-month contracts becoming 'secure' compared to single factory shifts. Insecurity made work less attractive because having done 'a shift or two … you're back on the dole again, and it's waiting for paperwork … it's not worth getting a job, place like that' (Rachel, Eastland). This weakened the importance of work, reducing its relevance in mobility decisions. This is especially the case because low-paid work was seen as essentially similar in other urban environments. As Mike (Eastland, 45–54, care worker) pointed out, 'places of a similar size are all gonna go "we once had a thriving whatever industry, and it's all gone down the tubes"'. If people would face the same challenges elsewhere, there was no imperative to move, and it becomes more

important to understand remaining in place as an active response to managing labour market change.

Residential (im)mobility and insecure labour markets

Low-paid work was an unlikely driver of mobility, with participants perceiving little demand for labour, insecurity and few prospects for advancement. It could be difficult to know whether employment was just around the corner. Hasan (Nearthorpe, 55–64, unemployed) talked about being told '"if we don't get the right amount of people, we will call you"', but he never heard back. His experience suggested that he was part of a static pool of labour, utilised in urban job markets according to fluctuating demand (Lupton, 2003). Lacking a firm job offer may also make people less likely to move to other job markets, as it was not 'worth leaving your family and friends and the place you know' (Jo, Nearthorpe, 25–34, looking after family). Indeed, the very flexibility that is seen as severing the links between people, place and employment could actually inhibit mobility, with people seeking to retain some security by remaining in places where they had dense, local structures of mutual aid, job networks and stable benefit claims.

Some participants had not really considered the option of moving in order to find employment elsewhere. For Dave (Nearthorpe, 55–64, unemployed) and Ros (Eastland, 25–34, looking after family), the option of moving for work did not form part of the choices that seemed open to them. Their experiences of living largely in one locality, and for Dave of working in the same factory for nearly 40 years, gave meaning to the possibilities that existed for action. For these participants, immobility was a more natural action than mobility, which was perceived as an exceptional event. This highlights the way in which the habitus pre-

adapts the possibilities that are seen by individuals (Bourdieu, 1990).

Other participants articulated a sense of calculation in their decisions, setting a baseline that many jobs failed to meet: 'If I wasn't doing the Open University, I would move to get a career-based job. I don't wanna work in MacDonalds … I don't mind going somewhere I can start at the bottom and work my way up' (Rachel, Eastland). For work to influence Rachel's mobility decisions, it had to offer something more than low pay and insecurity, the prospect of being better off in the longer term, of advancing along a career ladder. In comparison to the uncertainty of low-paid work, she could get by with regular benefit payments, and there was no point in moving away from everything that she knew.

Rachel's planned mobility pathway linked to the experiences of participants with a more middle-class orientation. Indeed, Rachel described her upbringing as 'quite well-to-do' with 'the two cars'. Such that housing strategies existed, and for many households there was little evidence of this, they were largely driven by the career strategies of more middle-class households. Mobility across different labour market areas afforded 'opportunities to progress' (Amir, Nearthorpe, 25–34, surveyor) and was an expected part of the futures of many professionals.

This does not mean that these households faced no barriers to mobility. Participants highlighted rational, economic calculations, with residential mobility for work contingent on not being worse off. This led some participants to reflect on the feasibility of mobility for those working in lower-paid roles. This was particularly the case when moving from areas of low employment to major urban hubs where 'they might get a slightly better paid job, but … will the housing costs suddenly evaporate for those people?' (Zahir, Nearthorpe). The nature of the housing market and wage levels was therefore seen as constraining mobility.

Even in the relatively affordable housing markets of Eastland and Nearthorpe, households referred to restrictions on mobility, from funding deposits to the cost of selling houses. Mobility strategies, such as selling belongings and negotiating with landlords to improve properties in lieu of deposits, largely facilitated moves within the same low-demand markets, rather than to areas with more buoyant employment and housing markets. However, rather than emphasising the barriers to moving, many participants highlighted the choices they did have in their (im)mobility, making subtle distinctions about places. For example, while Sumera (Nearthorpe) noted that they could not afford to move to a better area, her husband Zahir argued that the neighbourhood was changing around them, becoming somewhere that educated people actively chose to be, rather than ending up there through lack of choice.

The relatively modest role of work in the past mobility of households relates to experiences of accessing work. Many of those in low-paid roles used word-of-mouth contacts to find out about employment opportunities, something that was possible in urban contexts, but which spatially restricted search behaviour, making immobility an important part of finding work (Smith, 2005). Although networks deliver imperfect information (White and Green, 2011), they perform an important function in labour markets where people frequently moved in and out of work. Experiences of insecurity promoted connections with others 'like them' who could provide links to opportunities. However, while participants like Matt (Eastland) used existing family and friendship networks on an ad hoc basis to find work, more middle-class participants like Amir (Nearthorpe) built networks specifically to facilitate career-development opportunities in different locations. The specific experiences people had of finding and staying in work therefore guided responses to labour markets, demonstrating the variable importance of mobility.

Immobility as an active process

The results highlight how employment characteristics, class position and labour market context influence residential (im)mobility. However, immobility must be understood as more than the by-product of a failure to be mobile. Immobility is an active process through which participants developed different responses to changing labour market conditions. Many participants talked about forms of adjustment, from the type of work ('I'd do anything'; Matt, Eastland) to the volume ('I was working and going to all the recruitment agencies just to find another part-time job'; Aisha, Nearthorpe). James explained his own adaptation to the local labour market.

> I didn't really wanna go back into this … I was kind of holding out on like going back into factory again, 'cos I do hate it … I was looking out for summit a bit better, but I just gave in … I was … looking for a good position I could see myself doing for a few years, but … it wasn't happening, so I was just like 'yeah, let's … get some money making job on the go'. (James, Eastland)

James' experience of looking for work demonstrates his transition from initial resistance to eventual adaptation. Although he tried to find something better than food processing work, in the end he gave in to pressure from the Jobcentre. Rather than looking for a 'good' job, he adapted to the work that was available.

Although there was considerable evidence of adaptation in the type of work, participants were less likely to compromise on employment conditions. Matt (Eastland) frequently expressed his willingness to do any sort of work, yet also resisted the

expectation to take up work. His partner Sarah acknowledged that there was work locally 'if you really wanted to work *any-thing*'. Matt demonstrated flexibility around the type of task, but was unwilling to adapt to the conditions of agency work. Ros (Eastland) expressed a similar sentiment, noting 'the work itself doesn't bother me, it's the hours'.

However, adaptation to the needs of the labour market was no guarantee of getting work, especially for those without qualifications or with health conditions, at the back of the queue for jobs. Mike, for example, felt trapped in his care job, unable to go elsewhere because he did not have the qualifications new entrants required. As he explained, in the context of weak labour markets, 'everybody you would talk to who's got a job hates it, but you've gotta think "I've got a job"' (Mike, Eastland).

Not all participants adjusted their employment expectations to fit with the labour market offer. People were engaged in various acts of resistance, negotiating the boundaries of the local labour market. Informal working whilst receiving benefits was one form of resistance, whether cash-in-hand or doing odd days of agency work without informing the Jobcentre. Opportunities were therefore viewed alongside the comparative security of regular out-of-work benefits, as noted by Fletcher (2007) and Smith (2005). Fear of disrupting benefit payments led Matt to 'hardly ever tell them that I'm working', because 'for six hours' work is it … worth telling them?' (Sarah, Eastland).

Sarah and Matt also resisted the expectation by the Jobcentre to actively look for any available work. Instead, they were focused on getting 'good' jobs. Matt was doing a college course to pursue a skilled career, and Sarah saw that as 'more important than getting a job' because he would 'get a job that he wants to do … it's better than being stuck in a dead end job doing something that you

despise'. Rachel (Eastland) was in a similar situation of officially looking for work, but her focus was on completing a university course to 'work towards getting a decent job'. Again, Rachel was pursuing a long-term strategy rather than adapting in the short term to take any available work. Career strategies were therefore not just the preserve of more middle-class participants who were already pursuing a particular career.

These forms of resistance were linked to the future aspirations held by households. Far from the image in some policy discourses of households lacking in aspiration, trapped in 'declining' communities with little motivation, many households had specific and high aspirations for the future. These were associated with ideas about mobility, residential and social, to move forward and get ahead rather than just get by. As James (Eastland) explained, 'I don't wanna live in Grimsby all my life … I'd like to move up and go live in a more alive town'.

In some cases, the future aspirations held by participants were clearly linked to residential mobility. In Rachel's case, for example, fulfilment of her employment aspirations would necessitate residential mobility to continue her education. For others, the focus was on the next generation, and beyond:

> When we was children … we wasn't encouraged … I don't suppose I encouraged my two girls … now they're stuck … if you don't do something with your life, there is nothing here … I just hope [my grandchildren] do well, move out of Grimsby altogether … there's nothing for 'em here … I suppose any, any big city really would be better than here … anywhere where you can better your career. (Carol, Eastland)

Carol reflected on how aspirations have changed over her lifetime. The immobility of her own children is seen as a negative in a world in which spatial mobility is tied to

social mobility, a sense of progress and the need to have a career. This suggests that, while networks among those in a similar social position continued to be important in structuring everyday experiences, there is also evidence of individualised attitudes to work. The notion of 'getting ahead' was an individual or household pursuit, signalling mobility from, or leaving behind, others, rather than the seeking out of a more general improvement in working conditions involving those in similar positions.

Conclusion

Rather than being a driver of mobility, for many people work played a key role in immobility, enabling households to construct networks of information and support that counterbalanced an insecure employment context. It is not simply that other factors were more important in mobility, but that the nature of much paid employment made people actively less likely to be residentially mobile. The very changes that supposedly freed people from the geographic constraints of homes tied to sites of employment (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) have actually inhibited mobility for many. As experiences of employment have become more precarious, stability of residence and supportive networks have become more important. This is particularly relevant in relation to the scale of moves, since people are unlikely to move large distances to different urban environments to experience the same low-paid, insecure work. For professional households, the very fact of having a career fostered a sense of security and advantage to being residentially mobile. By contrast, for those oriented towards the low-pay economy, long-term housing and employment strategies were largely irrelevant.

People perceived labour market opportunities through the lens of their own experiences of work. Particularly in Eastland, the

agency-dominated labour market challenged 'common sense' notions of the value of work. Although faced with insecurity, people perceived that conditions would be the same in other places. Building up dense, local support networks counterbalanced these sorts of labour market opportunities, since people could adapt and adjust to get by whilst moving in and out of work. People were adapting to labour market changes, as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) argued, just not through individualism and rootless mobility; importantly, they were adapting in situ. There was value in remaining in local environments that were knowable to these participants, somewhere that they knew how to carry on in life (Burkitt, 2004: 221), where they had a 'practical sense' (Bourdieu, 1990) of how to get by in difficult times, drawing on knowledge that was place-bound in its value. Individuals performed vital roles in urban neighbourhoods, part of the 'web of casual public life' that provided a sense of external regard, even in difficult circumstances (Jacobs, 1961: 368).

However, being immobile in local labour markets was not the same as passivity in the face of labour market changes. As Coulter et al. (2016) argued, immobility should be seen as an active process. This conceptualisation underpins empirical exploration of the range of responses that people make to economic changes. As Cumbers et al. (2010) noted, emphasising the strategies that people use to 'get by' foregrounds their agency. Immobility can involve multiple forms of agency. For some people, adaptation to labour markets took the form of adjusting their expectations downwards. James' aspirations for a 'good job' were eroded by his contact with the Work Programme. His shifting expectations, from resistance to food processing work to acquiescence, from finding something with meaning in his life to the pragmatics of making some money, supports Bauman (2005: 66), in arguing that the

'workplace is still a source of living, but not of life-meaning'. For many participants, work performed a limited function and was one of a range of contributors to a web of support that enabled them to get by in challenging circumstances.

Those in employment also demonstrated adjustment to changes in the labour market, remaining in jobs they did not enjoy for fear of being unable to find security in employment elsewhere. Sarah had simply dropped out of the labour market; seemingly invisible to Jobcentre Plus; she was not actively looking for work and was instead thinking about the sort of career she wanted to pursue. Others resisted the expectation to take 'any job', instead working informally whilst receiving out-of-work benefits, or not looking for work. A number of participants focused on other roles that could provide them with fulfilment, such as being a parent. As Batty et al. (2011) noted, individuals' engagement in unpaid activities delivered benefits that sometimes seemed equal to or outweighed those delivered by paid work.

Resistance to adjusting their expectations downwards often went hand-in-hand with heightened aspirations for the type of work that could be available if they had the right skills. Some participants were seeking to increase their qualifications and pursue a career with more security and benefits. This focus on employability is suggestive of an individualised approach to work, in the sense that hard work and the right qualifications were seen as opening up access to meaningful and secure employment. Few participants questioned whether the labour market would actually deliver such jobs, and people's experiences suggested that lives continued to be structured by the enduring role of class position and geographical location (McDowell, 2003).

Individualistic narratives were therefore not entirely absent; people reflected on their own perceived personal failures to compete in the labour market, and participants across the occupational spectrum told stories of insecurity, flexibility and competition for work. However, this 'risk society' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002) was balanced against the way in which people maintained a sense of agency and lived lives connected to others. Cumbers et al. (2010) note that, although restructuring processes have to some extent fragmented the working-class, everyday acts of agency and resistance persist and it is crucial to draw these out. While 'true' acts of resistance against systemic sources of disadvantage may be rare (Katz, 2004), there were actions that were consciously directed against perceived sources of control. This included undermining Jobcentre conditions such as requirements to actively seek work, to take-up available employment and to inform assessors of changes in circumstances. Participants explained this as legitimate action in the face of past administrative difficulties.

While people were guided in their agency by their 'embodied history' (Bourdieu, 1990), framing the possibilities for action that people saw, this occurred within a specific experiential context, formed from individual life events and the lives of those with whom people lived. There was strong evidence of the important role played by networks of mutual support, suggesting connection to others and some sense of 'common cause'. The ways in which people responded to economic changes were therefore related to lives lived with others, suggesting the importance of grounding agency in broader webs of expectations and interactions, particularly in dense urban locations (Wright, 2012). Far from being passively trapped in areas with few labour market opportunities, immobility was an active response to precarious labour markets. Experiences of labour market insecurity promoted stability of residence and reliance on place-based networks, structures of support that residential mobility threatened to disrupt.

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Notes

1. Proportions cannot be precise because they compare people who moved in the year before the Census with the usual resident population on the day of the Census; no account is made for population loss/gain.
2. Analysis of Land Registry data utilises the first half of the postcode and therefore includes a larger geographical area than Census LSOA data.

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