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Paper 10

A Gift to the Community? Public Relations, Public Art and the News Media

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Abstract

The use of public art to regenerate former mining regions is now commonplace. This article assesses the function of public art within the public relations strategy of a mining company to facilitate planning and manage local opposition. A case study of the land sculpture, *Northumberlandia* (2012) and media-framing analysis demonstrate how corporately funded public art serves as a powerful public relations tool to justify the renaissance of surface coal mining. Media releases and more than 90 news items are analysed to understand PR strategies and media dynamics involved in representing the affected community. The article explains how public art functions as a public relations news framing device within a discourse of economic and cultural regeneration. Referring to the sculpture as a 'gift to the community', corporate public art claims a civic role. This preferred set of meanings is recycled in mainstream news as a process of 'PR framing' to circumvent local opposition.

KEYWORDS: Environment, local communities, mining, public art, public relations, media-framing analysis, regeneration

10.1: Introduction

It is common practice for public art to contribute to restoration of former industrial sites and mining regions by re-aestheticising damaged landscapes. This practice also forms a major dimension of corporate PR strategies. Using media framing analysis, this article examines how public art is used by private mining interests within PR strategies to circumvent local community opposition to new ventures. The role played by mining companies in discourses of environmental regeneration is pertinent, given confirmation of the need for fossil fuel emission reductions by the UN Intergovernmental Panel report, *Climate Change 2014: Mitigation of Climate Change*. The use of public art to manage local community opposition to environmental damage caused by mining therefore forms part of this global concern.

The land sculpture, *Northumberlandia*, is selected as a case study to examine how the affected local community is conceived and framed by the commissioning body's PR. *Northumberlandia* is a land form, a stylized female figure, designed by internationally known American landscape artist, designer and theorist, Charles Jencks. This public art project involves the excavation of coal in a semi-rural setting near Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England. Claimed to be the largest sculpture of a human form in the world, it was constructed of waste from an opencast mine beside the new town of Cramlington, South East Northumberland, between 2010 and 2012. Costing around £2.5m, it was jointly commissioned by the colliery and landowner in what they called a 'Restoration First' strategy, devised to facilitate planning permission for the mine. Northumberland County Council refused permission for the mine and associated landform in July 2006, but its decision was overturned on appeal in 2007 by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government. This article draws attention to corporate strategies to by-pass community interests and opposition by appealing to civic principles associated with re-aestheticising economically depressed and environmentally damaged localities. This theme is highly topical, as a consequence of the UN report and because UK controversies about shale gas fracking may extend across Europe as pressures grow on energy security.

Media framing analysis, also known as 'news framing', allows us to examine communication and PR strategies and mainstream media re-presentations involved in

managing meanings surrounding Northumberlandia. We assess the ways in which the affected local community is framed within the PR strategy and how far news media duplicate these preferred meanings. Media framing research provides evidence about how stakeholders use news professionals to communicate preferred meanings of events and subjects (see D'Angelo and Kuypers 2010, Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007; Wicks, 2005). By studying PR involvement in the process of framing news about Northumberlandia, we consider important questions about the ways corporate PR strategies manage local communities. We examine the motives behind Northumberlandia's creation, and how the sculpture and mine are presented through PR and news stories. We establish that PR heavily influences public debates about the impact of fossil fuel mining on localities through news media recycling of press releases, and we consider the consequences.

The first section addresses the principles that shape public art works associated with physical and cultural regeneration of communities and settings. The following sections examine preferred meanings framed by corporate PR to influence media representations of Northumberlandia. We argue that the news media masking of local community opposition and amplification of positive benefits of mining is achieved by PR framing the debate within discourses of cultural and land regeneration. This framing is accomplished by articulating abstract and speculative ideas about tourism and heritage in preference to tangible community interests and needs. We explore struggles between artist/commissioners, local community and media in managing contradictory meanings associated with the sculpture corresponding to the mine. These struggles are also expressed through its contested naming in the news variously as 'Slag Alice', 'Lady of the North', 'Goddess' and 'Fat Slag'.

10.2: Public art funding, cultural regeneration and local communities

Cuts in public spending drive public art into the private sector (see GOV.UK 2014). With public art increasingly commissioned through private and public-private partnerships, how this form of art is planned and funded and how it speaks to various 'publics' becomes a major concern. Yet gauging community benefits of public art, and how changing funding

principles affect involved communities, remains challenging. Disagreements are documented about public art's purpose and value, and about processes of production and execution (Hall and Robertson, 2001; Hartworth and Hartworth 2006; Pollock and Paddison 2010; Selwood 1995).

Debate concerning the cultural regeneration of cities through public art raises questions about the public nature of public art and the role of communities in its endorsement (see Selwood 1995; Landry 2000; British Council, Creative Cities 2008-2009; 2008-2011). Associating public art with a 'public realm' implies civic engagement and democratic process through participation or consultation (Sharp et al. 2005). Andy Hewitt (2011) detects three discourses of state-funded art: as modes of cultural democracy, economic force, and solutions for social renewal. Yet he argues that art contracted for culture-led regeneration promotes agendas of privatisation and marketization and undermines democracy. Associating public art with civic engagement and democracy is more complex and ambiguous when art is privately funded and economically driven. Referring to corporate, privatised public art, Cher Krause Knight (2008) argues for a populist agenda, asserting that successful public art does not necessarily need an egalitarian impulse. Such works share three qualities: they tend to create immersive, experiential environments for audiences to navigate through rather than objects to walk around. They generate intensely interactive relationships rather than passive viewership. They are usually private endeavours or public-private partnerships that do not misleadingly offer a 'false sense of egalitarianism'. These, says Knight, are often more appealing and more likely to be civic-spirited than the usual public art equivalent. In these respects, could corporately funded public art such as Northumberlandia be defined as 'populist' by advocating or promoting the interests and lives of ordinary people?

Environments damaged by former industry are increasingly drawing on public art to re-aestheticise landscapes and develop tourism (Pollock and Paddison 2010). Such projects are regularly undertaken in depressed locations beyond regenerated urban centres. Our concern, here, is not about the moral worth of all Britain's corporate art. Rather, we enquire about the way public art is appropriated to regenerate economically and physically spoiled regions in relation to environmental issues associated with mining.

We ask how art is used and how affected local community is defined, addressed and managed by private sponsors through public discourses of news and PR.

Various models of funding and community engagement have supported the use of public art to disguise and re-present damaged environments. A famous example is Antony Gormley's *Angel of the North* (1998), commissioned by Gateshead Council in North-East England. This monumental sculpture, 20m high with a 54m wingspan, stands on a former coal mine near the A1 trunk road rather than in the heart of a 'creative city'. It signifies a gateway to a whole region associated with former heavy industry and economic decline. Linked with Newcastle/Gateshead as a way of promoting place, the *Angel* was advanced by the local authority against much local community protest. However, beyond the local community, it was re-interpreted as a symbol of success, part of a wider culture-led regeneration of a region (Bailey et al. 2004; Cameron and Coaffee, 2005; Pollock and Paddison 2010).

Another example of public art used to regenerate mining sites is a 20m sculpture, *Dream*, on the former Old Sutton Manor Colliery, St Helens, Merseyside, Jaume Plensa's 2009 sculpture of a girl's head was funded by the Big Art project, Arts Council England, the Arts Fund and Channel 4 television. While the *Angel's* civic value is indicated by its municipal funding, *Dream's* consultation and commissioning involved the council, local residents and 15 former local miners (Gilmore 2012). *Northumberlandia* was commissioned privately by a mining company and landowner, yet its public presentation signifies a civic-minded spirit through persistent PR and media association of the project as a 'gift to the community'. The corporation's claim that the sculpture stands for 'the community' is precisely what confers on it the status of public art.

At first glance, *Northumberlandia* seems to function to rehabilitate a mining-damaged landscape. However, this public art form is employed in a strikingly different way. Labelled 'Restoration First', it was created next to a new mine to distract attention from the environmental damage that would cause. Permission to mine at the Blagdon Estate, South East Northumberland, was granted to Banks Group in return for the sculpture, described as a legacy to the 'community'. Blagdon Estate Chief Executive Bob Downer claims in media interviews and on the estate's website: "The whole idea behind *Northumberlandia* is that she is a gift to the local community and local businesses" (Sell

2014). Public art appropriation by private mining to restore damaged landscapes raises questions about how local communities are conceived and consulted during planning and design stages, and how they are expected to benefit from such initiatives.

But although *Northumberlandia* was privately financed, it forms part of the North East's reputation for major landmark sculptures. It sits in 46 acres of parkland made of waste from the Shotton mine on the estate owned by Viscount Ridley and worked by the Banks Group. *Northumberlandia* was part of the planning application to extract coal. Surface mining is highly controversial: fossil fuel mining contributes to carbon emissions. The massive impact of such mining on an area's topography, vegetation, and water generates local opposition. When mining ends, rehabilitation is obligatory. The 'Restoration First' strategy is a different approach. Playing on concepts of 'cultural regeneration', the idea was to aestheticise a landscape adjacent to the one damaged to soften local resistance. This public art initiative forms a key dimension of the company's PR strategy to manage relationships with publics, to display social and environmental commitment and ethical practice. As this practice is not strictly 'restoration' - with mining taking place nearby - 'restoration first' is misleading doublespeak.

Importantly, 'South East Northumberland' is a relatively new name for a region which has experienced severe decline. This once-prosperous area, with thriving fishing and deep-mining industries, experienced high levels of unemployment, poverty and ill health from the 1980s. It comprises 5% of Northumberland yet hosts almost half its population (141,000), and 17 of its 25 most deprived wards. Culturally, it is eclipsed by neighbouring 'creative cities' of Newcastle-Gateshead (Commissions North Northumberland Public Art Action Plan 2004-2008).

S.E. Northumberland's economic and social deprivation was addressed in 1997 by the Northumberland Strategic Partnership (NSP) formed by Northumberland County Council with public, private and voluntary sector partners (Audit Commission, 1999). A comprehensive regeneration of S.E. Northumberland initiated in 1997 to deal with socio-economic decline was led by the Northumberland Public Art Plan and commissioned by the NSP (Commissions North¹). The 'Inspire' project, a programme of public art, was developed by the South East Northumberland Public Art Initiative² established in 2003. A key objective was to commission new artworks to address the region's negative image

because evaluations indicated that local communities were ashamed of their region's reputation (Hartworth and Hartworth 2006). Inspire commissioned from regional artists landmarks, gateway features and 'environmental enhancements' in streets and communal areas to improve people's sense of place and belonging. Particular attention was paid to local community involvement. Yet evaluation of community representation was problematic (Hartworth and Hartworth 2006: 99). Descriptions rely on certain individuals that go to meetings and voice opinions. This draws attention to the controversial nature of public art and fluctuating community responses to it. Northumberlandia sits within this recently 'rebranded' region, adding a new dimension to its cultural regeneration.

The UK government focus on 'the local' and "your square mile" (Mason 2011 and 2013) triggers new questions about community and locality, confirming the importance of addressing community as geographically-bounded (for a review of conceptualisations of 'community', see Crow and Mah 2011). Problems of conceiving and managing 'the community' in the context of public art funded by mining companies are exemplified in the following sections.

10.3: Media framing analysis

Media frames are organising schemes which shape the meaning of advocacy campaigns or news stories (Nisbet 2010). Preferred meanings and frames of reference are selected from a plurality of explanations triggered through specific framing devices including visual icons, metaphors, catchphrases, sound bites, references to history and myth (Gamson 1992; Nisbet 2010). Frames interconnect concepts to generate associations within audiences (Scheufele and Tewksbury 2007). Much news framing analysis is located within political communication and economic news, health campaigns and sports news (see D'Angelo and Kuypers 2010; Bryant and Miron 2004). However, our own study found that recycling news from PR releases - 'churnalism' - was a major factor in determining news angles about mining, the regeneration of a locality and public art. We identified a process of PR framing: a process emerging as a prominent discursive site for media and cultural research. PR sources frame topics to make information more acceptable to journalists and to superimpose preferred meanings (Kuypers 2006). We were particularly interested in the framing of news about the local community affected by the mining and sculpture. We examined how PR strategies of *Northumberlandia's* sponsors were organised to guide and mobilise news and public opinion in favour of the initiative and marginalise opposition. We therefore tracked the frame of 'community' and analysed its elements.

Our analysis involved collecting a sample of over 90 reports (online news articles and editorials and PR releases) about *Northumberlandia* from the start of planning application for mining in 2004, to 2014. The sample was analysed in detail, using Tinderbox organiser to highlight phrases and link categories (cf. Reese 2010). Although in-depth news analysis with more than a small number of news stories is complex, we found a remarkably high level of duplication between reports across all news types. PR reports were adhered to so closely that they provided an underlying model that became a major analytical focus. PR and news reports were compared to locate media frame sources by conducting framing analysis of all four PR sources. These comprised collaborative PR strategies and news media releases from websites of the Banks Group and Blagdon Estate that commissioned *Northumberlandia*; the consortiums' *Northumberlandia* PR website; and that of the Land Trust with which the consortium partnered to facilitate future

management of Northumberlandia as a legacy. The sample of news and PR reports were categorised by theme and words.

'Community' was a dominant news frame throughout the ten-year span of news reports. It appeared in 86% of articles, distinguished according to periods: before and after the successful appeal. We identified and coded words referring to community, local residents and wider public: 'community', 'people', 'regeneration', 'residents', 'tourists', 'local' (eg. local people/businesses/industry), 'regional', 'public', 'Northumberland', 'Cramlington', 'visitors', 'environment'. We examined how these words were framed through in-depth analysis of PR reports and smaller samples of news representing patterns identified in the overall sample. In the pre-appeal period (2004-2007), we discovered significant but comparatively smaller PR influences. Most news items in local and some national news media concentrated on local opposition, referring to the 'community' in concrete terms as 'local' 'residents' and 'local businesses'. PR influences in news reports cited the concept, novelty, size, naming and female shape of the art form. Post-appeal references to 'community' dominated news reports but in the abstract, increasingly matching PR releases. We found the PR strategy was to locate 'community' within a broader cultural framework of heritage and tourism. This cluster of frames existed across almost all (96%) of PR and news reports. The corporate PR was able to manipulate framing of meanings by working in ways described in the following section.

10.4: The use of public art within PR framing

Initially, pre-appeal, we expected local opposition to both mining and sculpture to dominate local newspapers. But lacking their own PR machine, local opponents were unable to frame events as effectively as the company and landowner. We discovered public art to be a powerful device in framing news and, in itself, a major signifier of civic engagement. When the sculpture is a colossal, highly visible representation of a naked woman, it fits enough established news values to warrant conversion into news. The PR regime was able to manipulate the framing of meanings in the following way:

The Banks Group corporate website explains the “Restoration First” strategy as:

“taking an extra piece of land *donated by the landowner*, adjacent to the mine and providing a new landscape for *the community to enjoy while the mine is still operational*. The project team approached world-renowned artist Charles Jencks to design a new *landmark feature*” (our emphasis)³.

While the ‘community’ mentioned is vague, later in the same piece, Banks state:

“It was envisaged that the project would be an outstanding artistic landmark which would stand alongside the region’s other main *tourist* attractions, and would also provide high quality leisure facilities for use by *the local community* and *visitors* to the area for many decades to come (our emphasis).

The sculpture was formed, then, as a landmark to attract tourists rather than benefit the local community. It was recognized from the start that to serve as a strategy to gain planning permission, the work needed to relate to the ‘local’ community not just ‘visitors’. The emphasis on local community remains a central PR theme. Yet in later publicity ‘local community’ is subsumed under and eclipsed by ‘tourism’.

Early news references to *Northumberlandia* occurred in July 2004 when the mining scheme was being heavily criticised by residents of nearby Cramlington. An article in regional newspaper the *Chronicle*⁴ ‘Mining scheme sparks protest’, reported that the Banks Group planned to dig 5m tonnes of coal over 10 years from 850 acres of green belt near Cramlington. At this stage, media focus was on local community opposition. Regional and national newspapers reported opposition from residents, councils and local industry.

The North-East Assembly and Blyth Valley Council said it would damage the environment, the greenbelt and Cramlington's economy. The North-East Industry Cluster and pharmaceutical companies feared dust would compromise clean-air processes.

In a March 2005 BBC online report, 'Nude Sculpture mine plan attacked'⁵, 'community' meant local 'residents'. Cramlington North Councillor Wayne Daly is quoted:

"This is an application for opencast mining, not an application for a woman with 150ft breasts in south east Northumberland. The scheme would mean 150 lorries a day, fully laden, travelling on the main road between Blyth and Cramlington. We're talking about a huge impact on the environment. Only 2,500 people have been consulted out of nearly 38,000 people in Cramlington."

The article also quotes Banks' environment and communities' director, Mark Dowdall, saying: "I totally refute that there has been a lack of consultation. We published a report in June 2004, and prior to that we had numerous discussions with local residents and industry". The form those discussions took was not elucidated.

In response to the proposal, residents formed protest group SCRAM (Support Cramlington Residents Against Mining), and Northumberland County Council's Blyth Valley area committee opposed the scheme. Banks's consultants drew attention to the 'Northumberlandia' sculpture, arguing that it might generate annually 200,000 visitors and £1m in tourist spending. However, in July 2006 Northumberland County Council refused planning permission. A BBC national news report⁶ featured Banks's project manager emphasising the loss of jobs, yet highlighted local opposition:

'Many residents in Blyth and Cramlington were against the proposals because of the impact of pollution and lorries on the environment. A spokesman for Northumberland County Council said: "The planning committee concluded that the proposal would be contrary to the planning policies for this part of Northumberland and would not meet green belt objectives."' '

A Newcastle *Journal* article, 'Earth goddess fails to win adoration' quoted SCRAM chairman Kieran Kelly: "The idea of the landform sculpture is met with derision in terms of

design and location and demonstrates Banks's continued inability to understand *what is meant by consulting with the community*" (our emphasis).

Despite 2,500 objections from local residents and business, in 2007 the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government upheld Banks's appeal. The argument that Northumberlandia would attract thousands of visitors and lift Cramlington's profile, as the *Angel of the North* had done for the region, was a key factor. The Banks case also emphasised that the mine would generate 116 jobs and £140m for the local economy. It claimed the mine would meet urgent needs for a local supply of coal for Rio Tinto Alcan's smelter at Lynemouth. Yet that plant closed in March, 2012. Highlighting the local community's dismay, the *Journal* declared Fury as mine approved: 'Anti-opencast protesters claimed they had been let down by the Government last night after a massive new mine near a Northumberland town was given the green light'⁷. Until this stage, then, the regional press had diligently reported local opposition.

10.5: Representing community: 'tourism', 'heritage' and 'regeneration'

After winning planning permission, the company set about enhancing their image through PR promotion of the sculpture to sideline damage and disruption caused by mining. During the sculpture's construction, an extensive PR campaign re-presented and re-narrativised Banks Group as a benefactor of the local community. As a central feature, Northumberlandia was managed as a legacy. This allowed the company to redefine 'local community' in three key interlocking ways: by using 'tourism', 'heritage' and 'regeneration' in place of 'community', a successful PR framing device to sidestep local opposition.

The Banks Group and Blagdon Estate facilitated the management of Northumberlandia as a legacy by establishing a partnership with the Land Trust, an independent Charitable Trust which manages "open spaces on behalf of and in partnership with local communities". Support for local communities is a core value promoted on its website, couched in language of the Coalition government's localism policy: "We empower people across the country, enabling localism and supporting community ownership. We are driving the Big Society"⁸. The three partners created the sculpture's main promotional machine: a Land Trust-managed website:

'Northumberlandia: the Lady of the North'⁹, throughout which runs the theme of 'community'. For example, it explains that the management networked with the 'local community' by establishing a Northumberlandia Advisory Panel of community group representatives to monitor construction and decide its management plan¹⁰. This panel included the chief executive of Northumberland Tourism, who supported the scheme.

Despite local community objections and greenbelt re-classification, Land Trust chief executive Euan Hall asserts on the website in August 2009: "The aim of our organisation is to ensure *communities benefit from green open spaces* and Northumberlandia will certainly provide *significant community benefit* and add to the areas (sic) rich cultural landscape of Northumberland" (our emphasis)¹¹ and Banks's Mark Dowdall states: "Our dual aims with Northumberlandia were to create an outstanding

artistic landmark which stands alongside the region's other main tourist attractions and to provide high quality leisure facilities *for the local community...*" (our emphasis).

The sculpture's management as a *legacy* signified it as a 'gift to the community'. The Blagdon Estate website asserts: "Remember Northumberlandia was a gift to the community and is a free attraction..."¹². The consortium refers repeatedly to a 'gift to the community' while 'community' is undefined or redefined. Within press releases 'community' is identified as tourism by employing 'local community' and 'tourism' interchangeably through 'legacy'. Banks communications manager Katie Perkin says in 2012:

"When we end a project on a mining site we restore it. With this project we heard there was some local concern about a negative effect on tourism, so we decided to go one step further than usual and create a tourist attraction to leave as our legacy¹³. "

By referring to local people as 'visitors', Banks explains regional economic growth as a tourist benefit generated by Northumberlandia. Dowdall's words on the Banks website¹⁴ are replicated in a BBC online report: "Northumberlandia and the surrounding park will be a wonderful place for *local people* to visit as well as providing a boost to the *regional economy* through increasing the numbers of *visitors* ..." (our emphases)¹⁵.

The consortium's strategy of framing references to 'local community' in terms of economic regeneration and public art as a gift to the community successfully influenced news reports. The *Daily Mail* reported in June 2011: "This must also be the only major public arts project in Britain today that is not costing the public a bean" (Hardman 2011).

After permission was granted, themes of community opposition and environmental and health damage from surface mining vanished from news reports. Instead, media accounts duplicated PR framings of Northumberlandia: emphasis on community benefits, legacy and the spectacle of a woman's naked form. The PR focus on 'public art' as legacy was interpreted uncritically as community benefit, deflecting attention from wider debates about environmental damage and carbon emissions. A

reframing of the agenda indicates that without the mining, the community could not benefit from the 'gift' of art. The Land Trust's Euan Hall said in the *Telegraph* in 2012:

"Public art has a tremendous role to play in helping to *create positive benefits for local areas, giving back something to communities that have been affected by industrial activities*. Land-form art, such as the Northumberlandia, which is privately funded by the Banks group and Blagdon Estates, the landowner, will provide a lasting attraction for Cramlington...(our emphasis)¹⁶.

In the media, the sculpture was now described in terms of tourism, heritage and sensationalist features of scale and sexual connotation.

Associating Northumberlandia with the region's natural and cultural heritage became a predominant signifier in PR management of meanings about surface mining. Northumberlandia's PR framed its meanings in relation to wider and more oblique definitions of 'place' as *tourism* and *heritage* as a way of managing local community resistance. The Blagdon Estate factsheet¹⁷ bypasses local community by stating: "The Park will ...act as an iconic gateway to Northumberland attracting visitors from all around the world". Repeated references to the *Angel* infer the monumental scale and iconic status of Northumberlandia by association with an existing monument that 'speaks for' the whole region. Such references also infer that, as with the *Angel*, controversy will inevitably subside, allowing Northumberlandia's creators to disregard local opposition. This reportage indicates the extent of the PR machine's success. The artist, Charles Jencks (2012), advances a corresponding discourse about 'nature' and 'the cosmos' without contradicting the ongoing mining damage. Referring to his work as 'the cosmic landscape', Jencks argues: "It is time that artists, landscapists and our culture as a whole reclaimed this role of engagement with the universe: the renaming a park such as Northumberlandia in the creation of a new cosmic art"¹⁸.

Rather than celebrating a clearly circumscribed place of complex and fluctuating community meanings and identities, Northumberlandia is represented by the artist, its PR website and then the media as a gateway to somewhere else in much the same way as the *Angel of the North*. It marks the location as an access point within a vague intermediate

space *after* Newcastle and *before* the established heritage sites along the A1: coast, castles and heritage icons. While sightings from the A1 spectacularise the sculpture's colossal size, the 'community' is rendered transient as a stream of motorists. It is much easier to define this 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991) in terms of tourists and commuters than identify a specific local community. Jencks's account of his sculptural concept confirms this. He states: "She undulates several times. Her hip and breasts go up and down. And these curves relate to the Cheviot Hills in the background 10 miles away, the symbol of escape for city dwellers" (BBC 3 Free Thinking Festival of Ideas, 2011). The articulation of a relationship between city dwellers, distant Cheviots and Northumberlandia elides the dwellers of nearby Cramlington.

10.6: The displacement of local opposition

Northumberlandia's publicity was initially framed by community controversy. When planning permission was granted, even regional newspapers abandoned that angle. In addition to the framing of *Northumberlandia* through corporate PR, we found pertinent the type and ownership of news serving Cramlington and South East Northumberland. One of the most striking findings was that this highly populated area lacks direct news representation. Local daily newspapers are either Newcastle-based (*Evening Chronicle* and *Journal*) or serve the entire county (*Northumberland Gazette*). The *Morpeth Herald* serves a market town bordering South East Northumberland. A further salient finding was that both the *Morpeth Herald* and the regional *Northumberland Gazette* accept sponsorship from the Banks Group. This poses questions about how far news about the company's activities and local opposition to them can be reported neutrally. Post-appeal, controversy associated with local opposition was avoided in local news.

In July 2013, Banks announced plans for a 1,700 acre surface mine at Highthorn near Druridge Bay. Its website stated it would be working with Northumberland Tourism and Northumberland Wildlife Trust: "Northumberland Tourism is working alongside local employer Banks Mining to identify how Banks' proposed new Highthorn surface mine [...] could provide new enhanced facilities for tourists".¹⁹ The announcement was replicated in the *Journal*. Both reports mentioned *Northumberlandia*'s 'success' to promote the idea that enhanced tourist facilities would be provided.

Banks's website further declared: "Northumberland tourism and Banks Mining working to build on Northumberlandia's success through proposed Highthorn project"²⁰. Communications manager Perkin states:

"As a north-east employer that has worked in Northumberland for more than 30 years, we know the area extremely well. Its proximity to the popular beach and wildlife attractions at Druridge Bay makes Highthorn a unique and sensitive location. *We want it to set a new benchmark for modern minerals developments, delivering significant economic input alongside substantial benefits for the local community and wildlife*²¹."

The company appeals to its status as a *local* employer to argue that it will deliver benefits to the economy, community and ecology.

Regarding the Shotton mine, references to environmental damage and fierce local opposition were also displaced in local and national news by a focus on the naming of and sexual innuendo about the sculpture. A *Guardian* article titled: Sid the Sexist's favourite picnic spot? (Jones 2012) extolled: "Stand on Northumberlandia's head and you look down on her spiralling breasts, her splayed arms, her mountainous hips". Local community opposition was eclipsed within news reports by battles over the naming of the landform, signifying a struggle over meanings about the area, community and identities. The name 'Northumberlandia' given by the artist makes mythological claims for a whole county. Ideas of pagan ritual are evoked by the term 'goddess'. In contrast, the *Daily Mail* in May 2011, 'Slag Alice' is set to rival Angel of the North²¹, refers to the oppositional feminine trope: "the landform hasn't got the green light from local residents who have branded the landmark 'Slag Alice'. The Newcastle-founded Viz comic character, from whom 'Slag Alice' is derived, represents a strand of irreverent popular culture in which sexism is expressive of disrespect, derision and mockery. 'Slag Alice' destabilises and complicates official meanings by using waste as a metaphor to dethrone grandiose claims of the consortium and artist. It brings to mind the definition of "dirt as matter out of place" by anthropologist Mary Douglas (2002) while the 'Restoration First' strategy attempts to reorder 'matter' back into place to suit the mining cause.

10.5: Conclusion

This article explains how public art serves as a powerful PR tool to overcome community opposition and justify surface mining's renaissance. *Northumberlandia* highlights incongruities involved in commissioning privately funded *public* art in a context of local community resistance. The sculpture's creation is not simply a manifestation of the vital role played by public art in corporate PR and news framing. It provides a compelling account of the way public art is used to manage community opposition to fossil fuel mining impacting on the local environment. The mining company holds considerable sway over news framing of its activities by employing a discourse of economic and cultural regeneration which is uncritically re-presented in local, national and international news.

Four key interconnected issues emerge from this study which has cultural policy implications regarding protection of local communities. The first concerns the lack of public accountability of privately funded public art initiatives. In contrast to a public sector, subject to Freedom of Information Act disclosure, private companies are not required to hold and release records of processes of consultations with communities and community representatives, even in the production of 'public' art. This allows private corporations to use public art as a PR exercise to support planning applications for fossil fuel mining, despite local community opposition. The consortium claimed to have consulted extensively. In reality, a small advisory panel of group representatives were invited to monitor construction. Along with a local exhibition, this allowed the consortium to frame the process as evidence of wide consultation. Press releases scripted as such were largely uncontested.

The second and third issues concern media dynamics that allow news reports to be heavily influenced by corporate PR. The political economy of the news and influence of PR on news construction highlight the lack of a local community voice. *Northumberlandia* began as a signifier of local community opposition to surface mining. Initially, the local community were referenced as local residents, businesses and local authorities and then ignored: replaced by community as tourism and heritage. The opposition angle was dropped after the company gained planning permission since the local community had little power and no news avenues for publicising resistance. News from Newcastle-based regional newspapers, and two county newspapers which accepted sponsorship from the

company, represent the region's news interests. The company was able to rely on the newspapers it subsidised to express preferred meanings from its PR releases yet it was not only the press sponsored by the company that duplicated PR messages. This raises important questions about strategies of civic engagement in today's media environment. This brings us to the third issue, that PR is playing an ever larger role in news gathering as a consequence of 'churnalism'. PR releases are regularly copied without journalistic checking, verification, cross referencing or analysis. Through a case study such as Northumberlandia, we pinpoint the extensive role PR plays in news gathering and its effect on news. The Northumberlandia PR strategy set the news agenda and framed news accounts of the planning, mining and local community's reaction. Framed by PR accounts of projected employment and tourist benefits, news reports of community protests were abandoned. We found more than half of the news articles were at least partially derived from press releases. This corresponds with research by Lewis and colleagues (2008) and Davies (2009). With local papers economizing, fewer and under-resourced journalists rely on press releases and become accomplices in the "closure of discussion" (Franklin et. al 2010: 210).

The fourth point returns us to the role of public art in corporate PR. Corporate public art can in principle be a force for good. However, corporate use of public art for PR purposes raises significant ethical questions. The mining company is not simply using public art as a PR strategy to distract attention from environmental damage. Within this strategy, public art functions to present surface mining as a morally acceptable and positive endeavour that no longer needs to be defensive about environmental damage. This is done by framing debate in terms of benefits of regeneration and discounting damage. Northumberlandia is not an example of regeneration. By labelling it 'Restoration First' and a 'gift', the company is able to use this doublespeak to claim it provides a benefit to the local community while damaging its local ecology. In this way, surface mining itself becomes both *opportunity* and *gift*. A Banks spokesman states:

"The Shotton Surface Mine provides a unique opportunity to create a spectacular art form, *which otherwise would not be constructed*, whilst winning the much needed local coal for local industries (our emphasis)²².

By using concepts of 'tourism' and 'community' interchangeably, PR and media circumvent local objections to invoke economic and cultural regeneration. Re-presenting community space as tourist space can disenfranchise local communities. Surface mining becomes an opportunity to generate 'tourist' facilities, thereby obscuring mining's negative impacts on communities.

This notion that the mining company has provided opportunities to boost art, tourism and the landscape has had a profound impact on planning values and is benefiting the industry worldwide. The Northumberlandia scheme has received many awards. It was named the finest example of planning in a rural area at the Royal Town Planning Institute North East's 2012 awards and won the Tourism and Leisure category of the 2013 Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors North East Renaissance Awards. These are described in the regional *Journal* as "recognizing the very best planning projects, strategies and processes which are helping to create great places for people to live" (Black 2013). Moreover, international mining delegates attending the annual EU-India Coal Working Group conference, an international forum for senior executives to share ideas, were taken in 2012 to view "the stunning £3m Northumberlandia artwork," (Black 2012). The article quoted Banks planning director, Philip Baker:

"The UK mining industry faces different challenges to its peers in China, India and Australia, particularly around *the community and environmental aspects of their operations*. We hope that our international colleagues were able to get some ideas from us about addressing the challenges in these" (our emphasis).

The bulk of the story, with identical quote and photograph, was drawn from the Banks PR website²³, confirming that mining companies are sharing ideas about how to manage communities and their environments using public art. It indicates the extent to which corporate PR successfully exploits mainstream media to celebrate the corporations' global sharing of its expertise in using public art (and therefore the news) to quell local community opposition.

Notes

¹ Commissions North was established by Arts Council England, North East in 1999 to foster public art commissioning within capital and regeneration.

² Inspire is a partnership of South East Northumberland and North Tyneside Regeneration Initiative (SENTRI); the local authorities of Wansbeck District Council, Blyth Valley Borough Council and Northumberland County Council; Greening for Growth; Arts Council England North East; and Northern Architecture.

³ See <http://www.hjbanks.com/>.

⁴ The Chronicle (2004) 'Mining scheme sparks protest', available at: <http://www.chroniclelive.co.uk/news/north-east-news/mining-scheme-sparks-protest-1622156> (accessed 1st July 2004).

⁵ BBC News online, 'Nude Sculpture mine plan attacked', 29th March 2005, available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/tyne/4390043.stm> accessed 15th July 2013.

⁶ BBC News online (2006) 'Sculpture and Pit plans scrapped' 4th July 2006,

⁷ The Journal (2007) 'Fury as mine approved', 30th November 2007, available at <http://www.thejournal.co.uk/news/north-east-news/fury-as-mine-approved-4515285> (accessed 28th July 2013).

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<http://www.landrestorationtrust.org.uk/community/whoweare.html?WWAID=whoweare> (accessed 15th July 2013).

⁹ Northumberlandia: the Lady of the North available at: http://www.northumberlandia.com/page_details.html?PID=28&sec=ab (accessed 15th July 2013).

¹⁰ 'Northumberland Tourism Chief Backs Visitor Impact of Northumberlandia Landform, Northumberlandia: the Lady of the North, 21 February 2012, available at: http://www.northumberlandia.com/news_details.html?NID=692 (accessed 2nd September 2013).

¹¹ 'Trust seen as Potential Owners of Massive Human Sculpture', Northumberlandia: the Lady of the North, 13th August 2009, available at: http://www.northumberlandia.com/news_details.html?NID=1 (accessed 2nd September 2013).

¹² Blagdon Estate, 'Northumberlandia: Latest news', available at: <http://www.blagdonestate.co.uk/news/northumberlandia-latest-news> (accessed 2nd September 2013).

¹³ BBC News (2012) Northumberlandia: The naked lady of Cramlington available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tyne-19396755>, 1 September 2012, accessed 28th July 2013.

¹⁴ Banks News, "Turf Cutting Ceremony to Mark Official Start of Work on Unique Northumberlandia Landform", 14th April 2010, available at: <http://www.banksgroup.co.uk/turf-cutting-ceremony-to-mark-official-start-of-work-on-unique-northumberlandia-landform/> (accessed 2nd September 2013).

¹⁵ BBC News (2010) 'Work begins on 'Goddess of the North' in Northumberland', available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/tyne/8608779.stm> 8th April 2010 (accessed 15th July 2013).

- ¹⁶ The Telegraph (Comment 11th May 2012) 'Public art helps to revitalise industrial areas', available at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/letters/9265472/Public-art-helps-to-revitalise-industrial-areas.html> 15th May 2012, accessed 18th August 2013.
- ¹⁷ Blagdon Estate factsheet (2012) Northumberlandia: The Lady of the North, available at: <http://www.blagdonestate.co.uk/media/1310/northumberlandia%20fact%20sheet%201.pdf> (accessed 15th July 2013).
- ¹⁸ The BBC Radio 3 Free Thinking Festival of Ideas (2011).
- ¹⁹ Banks News, 23rd July 2013, Available at <http://www.banksgroup.co.uk/northumberland-tourism-and-banks-mining-working-to-build-on-northumberlandias-success-through-proposed-highthorn-project/> (accessed 22nd April 2014).
- ²⁰ Ibid.
- ²¹ In Mineral Planning, 27th July 2013, available at: http://www.dcservices.co.uk/bulletin/mineral_planning_bulletin/article/1193090/banks-floats-plans-huge-mine/?DCMP=EMC-CONMineralPlanningBulletin (accessed 3rd September 2013).
- ²² Daily Mail (2011) "'Slag Alice' is set to rival Angel of the North", , 22nd May 2011, available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1389661/Sleeping-Slag-Alice-built-coal-pit-set-rival-Angel-North.html> , accessed 15th July 2013.
- ²³ News Post Leader (2008) 'Mining Company Promise to Work with Community – Video', News Post Leader, 24th April 2008, available at: <http://www.newspostleader.co.uk/news/local/mining-company-promise-to-work-with-community-video-1-1625227> (accessed 3rd September 2013).
- ²⁴ Banks Group (2012) EU-Indian mining delegation visits north east to view industry best practice at Shotton surface mine, 8th October 2012, available at: <http://www.banksgroup.co.uk/eu-indian-mining-delegation-visits-north-east-to-view-industry-best-practice-at-shotton-surface-mine/> accessed 22nd April 2014.

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