

Towards the 'Big Society': what role for neighbourhood working? Evidence from a comparative European study

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Neighbourhood in policy

- Prominence of ‘neighbourhood’ under New Labour
- Enduring concept giving a spatial focus to a range of policy areas
- ‘Neighbourhood’ is a space that citizens identify with, feel a sense of belonging and where their concerns are in sharpest relief
- Neighbourhood as a site for action is inherent in the new Coalition’s plans for the ‘Big Society’

The Coalition Agreement

- New coalition government with twin policy aims:

1. The 'Big Society'

Community involvement in social action and public service delivery

Coalition Agreement: encourage volunteering, train community organisers, support the creation of neighbourhood groups, create and expand mutual, co-operatives, social enterprises

2. Localism/ devolution

Coalition Agreement: to promote decentralisation and democratic engagement and to “end the era of top-down government by giving new powers to local councils, communities, neighbourhoods and individuals”.

The 'Big Society'

- Public Sector Reform (ie. asking citizens to think about 'what the state can do for you');
- Community Empowerment ('what we can do for ourselves'); and
- Philanthropic Action ('what we can do for others'). Public sector reform

Continuity or change for neighbourhood?

- Big Society: continuation of focus on empowerment and other civic objectives
- Localism/ devolution: revival of 'double devolution' agenda
- Break from New Labour's use of neighbourhood as a site to tackle inequality
- These agendas are not new in the UK or more widely across Europe nor are they a policy fad

Research questions

- Aims to reflect and inform national policy
- Help local actors to make sense of likely changes and evaluate the fit between existing neighbourhood structures and new objectives:
 - How far do the policy objectives of the 'Big Society' align with the existing institutional framework at the neighbourhood level?
 - What does evidence from the UK and Europe tell us about how neighbourhood structures are able to help in realising civic objectives?

Understanding 'neighbourhood'

- Extensive discussion about what neighbourhood working means:
 - Spatial anchor at the sub-local level
 - Devolution of power and authority
 - Site for policy interventions and service delivery
 - Space for decision making and participation
 - Developing, delivering and monitoring the vision for the area

What is neighbourhood working *for*?

Rationale	Civic	Economic	Political	Social
	Opportunities for direct citizen participation and community involvement	Focus on efficiency & effectiveness gains in local service delivery Tax/spend bargain	Improvements in accessibility, accountability & responsiveness of decision making Enhanced role for elected members	Holistic and citizen centred approach to delivering services; designing services around the citizen
Form of democracy	Participatory democracy	Market democracy	Representative democracy	Stakeholder democracy
Institutional design	Neighbourhood empowerment	Neighbourhood management	Neighbourhood governance	Neighbourhood partnerships
Citizen role	Citizen: voice, co-production	Consumer: choice	Elector: vote	Partner: loyalty, problem solving
Link to Coalition policy	Big Society	CSR; Community Budget pilots	Localism	Community Budget pilots
Comparable typology	Self reliance: DIY community action	More market: private sector led	n/a	More state: strengthen welfare and reduce inequality

Making neighbourhood work

- Rationales ebbed and flowed over the New Labour period (Lowndes and Sullivan, 2008)
- Limited take up of civic rationale at local level (Durose and Richardson, 2009)
- Practitioners and policy makers alike have argued for the compatibility of these differing rationales
- But delivering on all these goals is challenging
- Pressures of delivering complex services often forces those involved to narrow goals at the expense of other functions
- Limited space for citizens

Research

- Comparative Study of Neighbourhood Governance (ECORYS Research Programme)
- Built on Evaluation of NSNR (CLG, 2010) / deepen evidence base
- Literature review
- Case study selection
 - Alt Valley, Liverpool; Neighbourhood West, Roubaix; Delfshaven, Rotterdam
 - Similar cities: ex-industrial cities fallen on hard times; history of militancy; experience of neighbourhood working
- Case study research
 - Desk review of local strategies and socio-economic data
 - Interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders

	Alt Valley, Liverpool, UK: Social	Neighbourhood West, Roubaix, France: Political	Delfshaven, Rotterdam, Netherlands: Economic
Civic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Your Community Matters – invited space ▪Separate to service provider meetings/forums ▪Cautious due to previous ‘politicisation’ ▪Initially lacked focus, short term, so thematic events, local shopping centres ▪Cllr input to format/events ▪Project specific resident involvement (e.g. community gardens and consultation with Liverpool Vision) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Neighbourhood West – two historical neighbourhoods >20,000 population ▪Neighbourhood Councils – 50% individuals ▪Neighbourhood committees – resident-created, ‘popular’ spaces, feed into Neighbourhd Council ▪Resident Participation Fund ▪Over-representation more affluent - min. quotas ▪‘Class confrontation’ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Neighbourhood and resident budgets ▪Delfshaven Duiten – ‘PB’ originated from City-District – ‘tokens’ ▪Opzoomeren – created from residents (festivals, environmental clean-ups), ‘popular’ space emerged organically, then City-District took on city wide with neighbourhood co-coordinators, now 18% participation
Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Limited devolution of services ▪Service providers exchange data and avoid duplication of effort ▪Commissioned Alt Valley Community Trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Neighbourhood Councils co-ordinate services in neighbourhood ▪Neighbourhood Committee service desks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪City-Districts – €30 million/annum (% of city budget), more localised service delivery/policy ▪Service commissioning (e.g. job scheme) ▪Bilateral agreements with partners, no sanctions for non-compliance
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪District committees – 90,000 population, defined by city council, ward councillors ▪Your Community Matters – Cllrs help structure ▪Cllrs chair NPWGs ▪Neighbourhood Area Agreements link to LAA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Neighbourhood councils – €100,000/annum, led by Neighbourhood Mayors (elected members of city council) ▪Criticisms of neighbourhood mayors’ performance, disillusionment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪City-Districts –tier of local government, all councillors directly elected ▪70,000 population, defined by city council
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪NMAs £100-200,000/annum ▪Neighbourhood Partnership Working Groups ▪Task and Finish groups ▪Witness protection scheme, Health Year, community gardens, sports, youth diversion ▪Close links with JET programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Micro-urban renewal projects (e.g. playground renovations) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪Strong overlap with economic ▪Funnelling of national regeneration budgets to meet local needs ▪Innovative homesteading and youth training and employment projects

	Alt Valley, Liverpool, UK: Social	Neighbourhood West, Roubaix, France: Political	Delfshaven, Rotterdam, Netherlands: Economic
Civic	X	X	X
Economic	XX	X	XXX
Political	XX	XXX	XX
Social	XXX	XX	XX

Liverpool: social

- Scale designed for service delivery - 5 NMAs- 6 wards each - 90-100,000 residents
- Stated aims focused on service delivery
- NMAs – 10 staff; additional £100-200,000/annum for local projects
- More significant investment through mainstream services
- Operational structures reflected the focus on the social – NPWGs & Task and Finish
- Shift of policy since change in administration in May 2010
- Proposed changes to move from co-ordination of services to direct delivery but focus on services the same
- Political rationale - District Committees as decision making bodies- developing neighbourhood plans, allocating the budget
- Councillors also Chair the NPWGs.
- Limited progress on the economic rationale- exchanged data but little evidence of significant efficiency savings through joint working

Roubaix: political

- Neighbourhood Councils – 15-20,000 residents - 80 members on a bi-monthly basis (half of whom are residents)
- Led by a local politician, the Neighbourhood Mayor who is a local elected official, chosen by the Mayor of Roubaix
- 2008 - changes because of accusations of demagogic behaviour by the politician leader
- 10-15 permanent staff; €100,000/annum for micro-urban renewal projects
- Social and economic rationales - paid posts e.g. Director, project manager, 'Cadre de Vie' Technician
- Elected Permanent Council progress actions & commission working groups,
- Progress on social projects e.g. 'Ecologic Corridor'
- Lack of economic rationale - can comment on, but no formal role in city urban regeneration policy

Rotterdam: economic

- 13 City-Districts – 70,000 residents each; delegated budgets (€30m/annum)
- Management of national regeneration budgets for district; 300 staff/City District
- District policy programmes & budgets negotiated with city government
- Facilitated more localised delivery of services
- E.g.
 - ‘public space behaviour rules’
 - commissioning local employment and youth services,
 - bringing local housing associations together to develop a neighbourhood action plan
 - renovating derelict homes in partnership with residents,
- Political rationale - city districts are lowest administrative level in the municipality
- City District Councils are democratically elected,
- Acts as local extension of the Rotterdam municipality government

What about the civic?

Liverpool

- Engagement through Your Community Matters events; household surveys; newsletters; via Cllrs to NPWGs
- Seen as less empowering than Objective 1 partnerships
- BUT partly deliberate – Obj 1 seen as highly politicised, residents obstructive, questions over representativeness
- Service providers sceptical that residents could contribute at a strategic level
- So a more cautious and 'arms-length' approach
- Direct result of the primary focus on the social rationale
- NMAs bigger than those identified with by communities, lack of identification with named areas
- Some experimentation: shopping centres; participatory budgeting,
- But 'directed consultation' felt to preclude genuine community participation

What about the civic?

Roubaix

- Neighbourhood Committees represented on Neighbourhood Councils
- Committees -1970s popular movement (Neighbhd Councils - 2003 Loi Vaillant)
- 15-20 permanent members, 1 f/t full-time employee,
- Tensions: Committees threatened by Councils (bigger, more cash, elected)
- Spilt: Committees mobilise inhabitants. Councils mobilise associations.
- Cooperate or fight: “we attack & threaten the council, we even go to court”
- City council ill-prepared for managing tension: “nobody had imagined that the existence of neighbourhood committees and councils would imply a shift in the decision making process.”
- Problems on representation: residents - ‘participative demagogy’
- Clash between better off & less well resourced: “there is no room for the 'little people”
- So now minimum quotas for different types of members
- Resident dissatisfaction - social over civic e.g. speed of projects; size of problems

What about the civic?

Rotterdam

- No formal role for residents (except voting & consultation)
- Progress: PB for Neighbourhood & Resident Budgets - 'Delfshaven Duiten'
- But no participation in bigger investment decisions
- Resident initiative - Opzoomeren – for 'gezelligheid' (cosiness) through street activities
- Co-opted city-wide – now is Opzoomer-office and funds activities
- Paid neighbourhood co-ordinators, & funded by city government
- 18% of all Rotterdam citizens now participate in Opzoomeren activities
- Good but came from residents; focus on small-scale community action rather than voice in decision-making

'What role for neighbourhood working in the 'Big Society'?

- Clearly, there is a role for 'neighbourhood' in the 'Big Society'
- But, what form should the structures take?
- Lowndes and Sullivan (2008) differentiated between:
 - 'popular' spaces: created by citizens, outside of conventional political systems and structures; and
 - 'invited' spaces: structures and vehicles created by the state

‘Popular’ or ‘invited’

- Significant opportunities for civic renewal may lie outside formal neighbourhood structures:
- Our three examples are all ‘invited’ spaces
- It is therefore perhaps not surprising that ‘civic’ objectives were neglected
- Our empirical examples also showed the potential of small ‘popular’ initiatives (Dutch Opzoomeren/ French Neighbourhood Committees) to deliver on civic objectives

Risks of community control

- Who sets up neighbourhood structures does matter
- But there is no ideal structure
- Increased community control can bring with it a series of risks:
 - Mismanagement/ lack of capacity
 - politicisation/ competing interests
 - insufficiently strategic
 - Questionable sustainability
- Also, there is a significant question about the appetite for the 'Big Society' from communities
- Many local authorities have struggled to make sense of recent civic agendas
- With local elected members often feeling threatened by community participation

Conclusions: ‘Popular’ and ‘Invited’

- Argue less for an ‘either/or’ strategy and more for an ‘and’ strategy
- NSNR evidence suggests that ‘invited’ structures can provide an important complement and catalyst to ‘popular’ activity (inclusion, capacity building, brokering etc)
- Community action takes time to develop and needs ongoing support from the state
- Some communities are more ready than others for the Big Society
- Rather than reducing the role of the state, in disadvantaged areas it may increased demands on the state
- Lack of focus on equity in the ‘Big Society’

- The need for neighbourhood structures is arguably stronger than ever
- But this comes at a time of ‘radical local austerity’...