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?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Civic</th>
<th>Economic</th>
<th>Political</th>
<th>Social</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities</td>
<td>Focus on efficiency &amp; effectiveness</td>
<td>Improvements in accessibility, accountability &amp;</td>
<td>Holistic and citizen centred approach to delivering services; designing</td>
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<td>Tax/spend bargain</td>
<td>Enhanced role for elected members</td>
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<td>Stakeholder democracy</td>
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<td>Neighbourhood empowerment</td>
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<td>Citizen role</td>
<td>Citizen: voice, co-production</td>
<td>Consumer: choice</td>
<td>Elector: vote</td>
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<td>Partner: loyalty, problem solving</td>
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<td>Link to Coalition</td>
<td>Big Society</td>
<td>CSR; Community Budget pilots</td>
<td>Localism</td>
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<td>Community Budget pilots</td>
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<td>Comparable</td>
<td>Self reliance: DIY community action</td>
<td>More market: private sector led</td>
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<td>typology</td>
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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
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Civic</th>
<th>Neighbourhood West, Roubaix, France: Political</th>
<th>Delfshaven, Rotterdam, Netherlands: Economic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alt Valley, Liverpool, UK: Social</td>
<td>Neighbourhood West – two historical neighbourhoods &gt;20,000 population</td>
<td>Neighbourhood and resident budgets</td>
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<td>Your Community Matters – invited space</td>
<td>Neighbourhood Councils – 50% individuals</td>
<td>Delfshaven Duiten – ‘PB’ originated from City-District – ‘tokens’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Separate to service provider meetings/forums</td>
<td>Neighbourhood committees – resident-created, ‘popular’ spaces, feed into Neighbourhd Councill</td>
<td>Opzoomeren – created from residents (festivals, environmental clean-ups), ‘popular’ space emerged organically, then City-District took on city wide with neighbourhood co-ordinators, now 18% participation</td>
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<td>Cautious due to previous ‘politicisation’</td>
<td>Resident Participation Fund</td>
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<td>Initially lacked focus, short term, so thematic events, local shopping centres</td>
<td>Over-representation more affluent - min. quotas</td>
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<td>Cllr input to format/events</td>
<td>‘Class confrontation’</td>
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<td>Project specific resident involvement (e.g. community gardens and consultation with Liverpool Vision)</td>
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<td>Economic</td>
<td>Neighbourhood Councils co-ordinate services in neighbourhood</td>
<td>City-Districts – €30 million/annum (% of city budget), more localised service delivery/policy</td>
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<td>Limited devolution of services</td>
<td>Neighbourhood Committee service desks</td>
<td>Service commissioning (e.g. job scheme)</td>
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<td>Service providers exchange data and avoid duplication of effort</td>
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<td>Bilateral agreements with partners, no sanctions for non-compliance</td>
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<td>Commissioned Alt Valley Community Trust</td>
<td>City-Districts – tier of local government, all councillors directly elected</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political</td>
<td>Neighbourhood councils – €100,000/annum, led by Neighbourhood Mayors (elected members of city council)</td>
<td>70,000 population, defined by city council</td>
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<td>District committees – 90,000 population, defined by city council, ward councillors</td>
<td>Criticisms of neighbourhood mayors’ performance, disillusionment</td>
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<td>Your Community Matters – Cllrs help structure</td>
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<td>Cllrs chair NPWG</td>
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<td>Neighbourhood Area Agreements link to LAA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Micro-urban renewal projects (e.g. playground renovations)</td>
<td>Strong overlap with economic</td>
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<td>NMAs £100-200,000/annum</td>
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<td>Funnelling of national regeneration budgets to meet local needs</td>
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<td>Neighbourhood Partnership Working Groups</td>
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<td>Innovative homesteading and youth training and employment projects</td>
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<td>Task and Finish groups</td>
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<td>Witness protection scheme, Health Year, community gardens, sports, youth diversion</td>
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<td>Close links with JET programmes</td>
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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’…