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Poverty and Place

Living through change in challenging neighbourhoods: Thematic analysis

Nadia Bashir, Elaine Batty, Ian Cole, Richard Crisp, John Flint, Stephen Green, Paul Hickman, and David Robinson

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This paper brings together a series of summaries examining the perceptions and experiences of residents from six lower-income neighbourhoods in Britain.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) produced this collection of summaries as an interim output from its Poverty and Place Programme. It is based on initial analysis of *Living through change in challenging neighbourhoods*, a three-year research study aiming to achieve a better understanding of the respective dynamics of poverty and place.

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This paper was produced as an interim output from a three-year programme of research aiming to achieve a better understanding of the dynamics of poverty and place.

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation is supporting this programme as part of its programme of research and innovative development projects, which it hopes will be of value to policymakers, practitioners and service users. The facts presented and views expressed in this report are, however, those of the authors and not necessarily those of the JRF.

Joseph Rowntree Foundation
The Homestead
40 Water End
York YO30 6WP
www.jrf.org.uk

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Contact:
Ian Cole
I.D.Cole@shu.ac.uk

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Introduction

Living through change in challenging neighbourhoods is a major qualitative study of six lower income neighbourhoods in Britain. The research is being undertaken by a team from Sheffield Hallam University under the leadership of Professor Ian Cole and with support from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

The main basis of the research comprises two waves of semi-structured interviews with nearly 200 residents, conducted between 2007 and 2009. The summaries presented in this working paper are drawn from these interviews. The case study neighbourhoods selected for the research were based in Anglesey, Blackburn, Edinburgh, Knowsley, Grimsby and West London. The summaries present residents' perceptions and experiences, and give an initial assessment of the extent to which these support or challenge current policy debates. They represent interim outcomes from the project's thematic analysis of the research material.

Two thematic working papers have already been produced. One, focusing on work and worklessness, is available at: http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/work-worklessness-deprived-neighbourhoods-full.pdf. The second, focussing on the impact of the recession, can be found at: http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/recession-deprivation-communities-full.pdf.

The remaining thematic papers are summarised in this working paper, with links available to each full document.

The summaries focus on the following themes:

- the relationship between work, place and identity;
- concepts of self-esteem and comparative poverty;
- patterns of residential mobility and immobility;
- the 'time-space biographies' of residents' daily lives;
- the relationship between neighbourhood infrastructure and social interaction;
- family, friends and neighbours' roles in social and support relationships;
- differential experiences of 'social mix'; and
- perceptions of neighbourhood change.

The entire data resource of the project, including material from a third wave of interviews with a sub-sample of respondents, is currently being analysed on a cross-thematic basis. The final report will be published in 2011.

Further detail about the study can be found at the dedicated web-site: http://research.shu.ac.uk/cresr/living-through-change/index.html.

1. Work, place and identity: the salience of work for residents

Key points:

- Work played a key role in the formation of identities of individuals and in understandings of place across all six neighbourhoods.

- There was a profound sense of loss centred on the perceived decline of key sources of employment in four neighbourhoods. However, this was not apparent in the London and Edinburgh case studies.

- Narratives of decline focused on the loss of male-dominated industries such as manufacturing. By contrast, there was little discussion of changing employment opportunities for women, despite their growing participation in the labour market over the same period.

- Debates around jobs at the lower end of the labour market may oversimplify experiences of low-paid, low-skilled employment. Whilst this research showed it can impact negatively on well-being, it can also deliver a number of benefits, including financial independence, social contact and a sense of purpose.

- Individuals rarely compared themselves with others on the basis of income or occupational status. However, some residents did make moral distinctions based on *orientations* to work and sought to distance themselves from others perceived to have opted not to work.

- Unpaid activities such as parenting, caring and volunteering provided a number of benefits, including a sense of purpose and a feeling of contributing to the wider community or society as a whole. These benefits were sometimes seen to equal or even outweigh those delivered by paid work.

This summary explores residents' perceptions of economic opportunity and experiences of work to understand if, and how, work shapes the identities of individuals and places.

The research identified a profound sense of loss centred on the perceived decline of key sources of employment in all neighbourhoods except in the London and Edinburgh-based case studies. Processes of industrial restructuring are deeply embedded in residents' understandings of the places where they live. These accounts echo other studies that emphasise the corrosive effects of the decline of male-dominated workplaces on the social fabric of neighbourhoods.

> *"In Bedford, most of the high flyers* [work] *in London, it's a commuter town… it's generally supposed to be a better area. Here it's ex-heavy industry town…so the people in this town are heavy industry people, engineers or something to do with that line and there's nothing for them to do now"*
> (Sajid, working full-time, Blackburn)

By contrast, there was little discussion in the interviews of changing employment opportunities for women, despite their growing participation in the labour market over the same period. This suggests that whilst understandings of neighbourhoods are intimately associated with work, they are gendered and reflect historic patterns of male employment.

The research found that low-paid, low-skilled work can negatively impact upon well-being if it involves long or unsocial hours, low pay or is insecure. Whilst this corroborates some debates about jobs at the lower end of the labour market, such work may also confer valued benefits, including financial independence, social contact, a sense of purpose and a feeling of 'making a difference' to others' lives. This suggests the importance of a more nuanced portrayal of such employment - not to endorse some of the more simplistic claims about the value of work regardless, but rather to suggest individuals can invest meaning and significance in their jobs *in spite* of onerous terms and conditions.

The study also found that individuals rarely compared themselves with others on the basis of income or occupational status. Nonetheless, work continues to function as a signifier of social difference based on perceived *orientations* to work. Residents sometimes sought to assert 'moral worth' by distancing themselves from those perceived to lack commitment or motivation to work. This condemnation indicates that the portrayal of worklessness as an individual, behavioural or cultural problem by some policymakers and sections of the media is produced and reproduced *within* lower-income neighbourhoods.

Unpaid activities played an important role in the construction of identity for those out of work. Individuals engaged in parenting, caring and volunteering experienced a number of benefits, including a sense of purpose and, in some cases, a feeling of contributing to the wider community or society as whole. These benefits were sometimes seen to equal or even outweigh those delivered by paid work.

> *"...in order to feed myself as a human and provide something to my society I am not living just for my mother, I have two days per week to four days, one day I go* [to a hospital] *and work as volunteer there... and I work also as volunteer in my... church"*
> (Ahmed, full-time carer, West London)

This challenges claims made about the positive impact of paid work on well-being compared with the negative effects of worklessness. The evidence suggests there may be value in ensuring that workless individuals have opportunities to engage in unpaid activities in the absence of employment given the benefits such activities can provide both to themselves and to others around them.

This summary, by Richard Crisp, is based on a full working paper available here: http://research.shu.ac.uk/cresr/living-through-change/documents/RP10WorkandIdentity.pdf

2. Self-esteem and comparative poverty

Key Points:

- The accounts of residents supported the contention that living on a low income often generates anxiety and low self-esteem, with detrimental impacts on psychological wellbeing. This is linked to a personal internalisation of self-critique, self-blame and a sense of not being clever or resourceful enough to manage on a low income.

- However, residents also articulated the importance of agency, endeavour, self-reliance and responsibility. The picture portrayed was not one of passive inevitability or despair about circumstances or prospects. This counters notions of a different set of values and cultural norms playing out in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Rather, it generates a sense of possibility about the future.

- Most residents did not assess themselves in a strong comparative framework to wider society or their neighbours. Rather, individuals compared themselves to other family members or their own previous experiences (including their childhood). Also, the impact of neighbourhoods on perspectives of comparative poverty and self-esteem appeared to be limited.

- Drivers of self-esteem are complex and income and material circumstances are only one element of individuals' assessment of themselves. The researchers conclude that some previous studies of poverty may have understated the assets and positive sources of esteem within lower-income households, and may have underplayed the extent to which disadvantaged communities themselves contribute to distinctions between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' groups.

One objective of the research was to contribute to a better understanding of how low incomes impact on people's everyday lives. Analysis suggested that living on low incomes generated anxiety, low self-esteem and detrimental psychological effects for many individuals. People internalised a personal and self-critical explanation for their circumstances, based on a sense of not being clever or resourceful enough or having made the wrong choices. In such processes, structural explanations (such as de-industrialisation) were negated in favour of self-critique and the perceived ability to determine one's own outcomes. This focus on agency also generated the perceived possibility of a future improvement in individual circumstances and prospects.

Far from expressing a sense of passive fatalism or dependency, individuals articulated the importance of self-reliance, resilience, autonomy and personal responsibility. This did not support the idea that disadvantaged neighbourhoods have a culture made up of social norms and values that are somehow different from the rest. Rather, it echoed longstanding working class values of pride, independence and respectability.

> *"Everything I've got, it's mine. I worked for it, paid it myself"*
> (Graham, 25-29, Anglesey)

The findings suggest that the assets and positive sources of self-esteem within lower-income households have been understated. The drivers of self-esteem are complex. Income or material circumstances were only one element, and were often secondary to family, health, parenting, religion, volunteering or educational or employment achievements. Of course, an adequate income is important in enabling some of these other sources of positive self-esteem to be achieved.

Individuals often viewed their circumstances and actions as mundane and taken for granted, as 'what had to be done'. This meant that they did not necessarily view their lives as 'problematic'; rather, they saw themselves within a membership of 'ordinary hard working families'.

This linked to the limited extent to which individuals conceived their lives within a comparative framework of poverty or evaluated themselves against others. Rather than comparing themselves to their neighbours or wider society, people compared themselves to family members or previous periods in their own lives. However the 'good luck to them' (rather than resentful) attitudes to those on higher incomes contrasted with hostility to those deemed not to have lived up to expectations of independence and self-reliance.

> *"I think people look down on people out of work… I know they probably don't but you do feel that, your own self worth, self confidence, you feel like people think of you as lazy even though they don't know the half of it"*
> *(*Rebecca, 25-29, Knowsley)

Living in a neighbourhood was not viewed as a particularly strong driver of self-esteem, although for some individuals, distinctions based upon length of residence or nationality were important to their self-identity (and their views of others).

However, neighbourhoods *were* important for individuals' ontological security and this could be severely affected by crime and anti-social behaviour. Regeneration programmes could also impact on residents' psychological wellbeing.

The research highlights the implications of individualistic notions of poverty and citizenship being framed by economic or employment status. There is a need to recognise the centrality of collective mechanisms and non-material elements in generating a sense of wellbeing for individuals.

This summary, by Elaine Batty and John Flint, is based on a working paper available here: http://research.shu.ac.uk/cresr/living-through-change/documents/Esteemcomparativepovertyfinal.pdf

3. Residential mobility and immobility

Key Points:

- Most residents interviewed could be described as being residentially *immobile*; they had not moved in the recent past and did not intend to do so in the immediate future. However, the majority of these were not immobile because they felt 'trapped' in their neighbourhoods but because they were happy to stay put.

- A number of academics and policy-makers have argued that labour market opportunities should be a key factor driving the housing location decisions of workless and lower income residents. This emerged as being a relatively unimportant driver of residential mobility in our research, suggesting that the impact on the labour market of 'freeing-up' and lubricating housing supply may be limited.

- Greater mobility was not necessarily seen as a positive or desirable aspiration for residents. The accounts of many workless respondents suggested that they were only able to 'get by' in very difficult and challenging circumstances because of the close proximity of friends and family who provided support. A more accurate way of describing those who wish to remain in their current neighbourhoods would be 'settled' or stable' rather than 'immobile', which carries negative connotations.

- Analysis identified a multitude of mobility 'push-pull' factors for residents which had variable salience in each of the six neighbourhoods but which could be categorised under three broad headings: factors relating to the social, cultural and physical characteristics of place; factors relating to family and friends; and factors relating to the home itself.

The last forty years has seen a growing interest amongst members of the policy community in residential mobility in deprived neighbourhoods, prompted by a concern that the British housing system has hampered the flexibility of the labour market and put a break on economic growth. The argument runs that housing supply has not allowed residents to move relatively easily from one area to another, preventing them from moving from unemployment 'hotspots' to areas of employment growth. Furthermore, it has been posited that the labour market *should* be a key driver of mobility in deprived neighbourhoods, as they house a disproportionately large amount of workless residents, a population group who *should* be motivated to move to areas with greater job opportunities.

This research found the labour market not to be an important driver of either past or future mobility. Even for those residents who had moved relatively long distances to reside in their current neighbourhood, the labour market did not appear to be a significant contributory factor behind their decision to do so. The key drivers of mobility (or push-pull factors) in the case studies were: the social, cultural and physical characteristics of place; family and friends; and attributes relating to property.

A number of push-pull factors relating to 'place' appeared to play an important role in shaping residential mobility. Some of these related to the physical attributes of a neighbourhood, including: its location; its perceived 'attractiveness'; and inextricably linked to this, the presence of green spaces and proximity of natural water features (whether river or sea).

> *"No, I must admit I wouldn't part with this place. I'm glad when I go away and I come back and it's home, because it is, it's just lovely being round about here"* (Renee, 45-64, Edinburgh)

Some factors related to the social characteristics of a neighbourhood, including social ties and interaction, and perceived levels of crime and anti-social behaviour.

> *"... there is virtually no crime in this area. You go one street down and there is: why that is I've no idea. I suppose it's the same everywhere. But in this L shaped section we all look out for one another. It's close knit and everybody knows what everybody's doing. If one's on holiday everybody looks out"* (Julie, 45-64, Grimsby)

The quality of neighbourhood infrastructure and amenities in an area was a final set of factors relating to place that had both physical and social dimensions.

For many residents, it was the desire to live close to their family because of the support they provided that appeared to be the biggest push pull factor in their lives. Support could take many forms, including emotional, financial (such as loans) and practical (such as childcare). As well as acting as a pull factor for residents, 'family' also acted as a check on mobility for some residents. These residents reported that they could not leave their neighbourhood because they provided support to family members who lived there.

> *"I used to live round here when I were young. From when I were born. I moved when I was 16 from round here and then I've only had two moves since then and then to here… (I moved back because) my girls go to school down road and my partner's family all live round here. And my doctor's is round here and I know the area. I know a lot of people round here"*
> (Tracey, 25-29, Blackburn)

This summary, by Paul Hickman, is based on a full working paper available here: http://research.shu.ac.uk/cresr/living-through-change/documents/UnderstandingResidentialMobilityandImmobilityinChallengingNeighbourhoods_000.pdf

4. Spatial routines: Time-space biographies of daily life

Key Points:

- People were pursuing complex and highly individualised spatial routines; those spending most of their time in their neighbourhood were the exception rather than the norm. This was consistent across the six neighbourhoods, for different age groups, in a range of household situations, and fulfilling different roles and responsibilities. This challenges assumptions that people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods have tightly bounded spatial routines rooted in their immediate locality.

- Extending spatial routines typically represented an adaptive mechanism, through which people compensated for and sought to overcome the limits of their neighbourhood. Residents moved through and into places where opportunities were more readily available and accessible. Key triggers included: employment; education and training; shopping; leisure activities and facilities; public services and goods; and social networks.

- Four overlapping and inter-related bundles of issues and influences were identified as shaping spatial patterns. These were associated with the individual (identity and disposition; resources) and the nature of places in which they lived (contextual characteristics; socio-cultural features). Understanding the resulting biographies of daily life is not about establishing the relative importance of one of these over the others, but exploring the relational connectivity between each.

- The balance of opportunities within and beyond different neighbourhoods varies markedly, according to the particulars of the local geography of resource availability and the quality of these resources. Also, the relevance and appropriateness of resources within and beyond the neighbourhood will be highly individualised.

There is a tendency in policy discussion and academic debate about poverty-related behaviours and associated impacts to assume that people live spatially bounded (neighbourhood-based) lives. Lower income neighbourhoods can be portrayed as spaces of difference, where internally cohesive and segregated communities nurture dispositions and behaviours that deviate from wider social and cultural norms.

Efforts to comprehend area effects associated with living in deprived places fail to take account of the real world 'action-spaces' of individuals. Meanwhile, research into 'getting by' has tended to be aspatial in emphasis, focusing on household budgeting practices, informal economies and reciprocal patterns of care. Yet, one of the ways in which people might seek to overcome or compensate for the penalties of place is to extend the routines of everyday life.

> *"... because I've got long term health problems I fill my days and what I do is things like get the dog in the car and go for a walk and do the shopping on the way home, but I go somewhere nice to go for a walk like go to walk along the beach at Blackpool or I might take her up to the woods at Tockholes. If I go up to Tockholes I could go to Sainsbury's in Darwin. But I love being in Blackburn, that's where my base is, Blackburn's my home, the whole place"*
> (Mary, Blackburn)

The spatial routines of daily life among interviewees in the case studies were complex and highly individualised but, in the vast majority of cases, they extended beyond the local neighbourhood on a regular and frequent (often daily) basis. This is a simple but important finding because it challenges the assumption that people in deprived neighbourhoods follow tightly bounded spatial routines rooted in their immediate locality.

Of the various push-pull factors serving as triggers of mobility within the spatial routines of respondents, shopping was the most common. Employment was another important influence, many people venturing beyond the residential neighbourhood to find work. Younger people were prompted to leave the neighbourhood on a regular basis to access education and training opportunities. Other factors extending spatial routines regularly included leisure activities and the need to utilise public services and goods. Routines of association with family and friends were also an important mobilising force in the lives of many respondents.

The time-space biographies of respondents were the product of the complex inter-relationship between individuals - their dispositions as manifested in aspirations and practices - and the nature of place, as a social and material setting, and as a '*meaningful* location'. Understanding spatial routines therefore demands consideration of the particulars of the places within which they are rooted, pass through and avoid, and the incidents to which individuals are exposed, the resources at their disposal, and the dispositions prompting action (and inaction). This approach recognises that the balance of opportunities within and beyond different neighbourhoods will vary markedly, according to the particulars of the local geography of resource availability and the quality of these resources. It also recognises that the relevance and appropriateness of available resources within the residential neighbourhood and the gains likely to be secured through extended

spatial routines, will be highly individualised and reflect personal preferences and requirements.

This summary, by David Robinson, is based on a working paper available here: http://research.shu.ac.uk/cresr/living-through-change/documents/TimeSpaceBiographies.pdf

5. Neighbourhood infrastructure, 'Third Places' and patterns of social interaction

Key Points:

- Public places such as local shops, pubs, cafés, clubs and community centres have been described as being "third places" of social interaction after the home (first) and workplace (second). The research confirmed a range of third places as important and valued mediums for interaction in lower income neighbourhoods, with shops and markets emerging as most important.

- Although all socio-demographic groups made use of third places, residents who spent most of their day at home (because they were unemployed, in poor health, retired or had childcare responsibilities) were particularly likely to use them.

- Some residents were deterred from using some third places because they perceived their regular users to be unwelcoming or even hostile. Others found it difficult to use them because of ill-health or disability, because they were reluctant to venture from their homes after dark, or because they lacked the 'social confidence' to do so.

- Some respondents simply did not want to socially interact with other residents, and their (non-) use of third places reflected this fact. A number of interviewees chose to avoid third places *precisely* because they were places where social interaction was likely to happen.

- In addition to performing a "practical" function as a medium for social interaction, third places also appeared to have a symbolic role within the case studies: they were seen by residents as being a marker of the "health" and "vibrancy" of their neighbourhoods.

In recent years there has been concern about a reduction in the quantity and quality of neighbourhood amenities in lower income neighbourhoods, a trend which has seen to have been exacerbated by recession. As a result, the opportunities for residents to interact in public spaces like shops, pubs and cafés is seen to have reduced. These spaces have been described as being "third places" of social interaction after the home (first) and workplace (second).
Across the case studies in this research, much of the social interaction that residents appeared to value in their lives occurred in third places and their importance as social places was often articulated. One respondent noted:

> *"It's sad that there are no more little shops and cafes because there aren't enough places to socialise now"*
> (Bunny, 30-34, Anglesey)

And another:

> *"Well, we use the library. We've got the doctor just a couple of streets up so we go there, the wee shopping centre. That's used nearly every day. We go down there and it's a lovely wee place that actually. It's so friendly and you can go anywhere and get anything there…"*
> *(*Ivy, 45-64, Edinburgh)

Although a number of spaces emerged as being important mediums for social interaction, including: community centres, libraries, churches, mosques, pubs and cafés, in line with the findings of other studies, shops emerged as the most important 'third place'.

Some residents were deterred from using third places because they:

- perceived their long standing users or 'regulars' to be unfriendly, unwelcoming and, on occasions, 'hostile.' This was particularly the case in relation to community centres.
- found it very difficult to (physically) get to them because of infirmity, ill-health and disability, which was compounded by the perceived failure of local agencies to provide them with assistance.
- were reluctant to venture from the homes after dark.
- lacked social 'confidence' and were 'uncomfortable' in social situations. This was more likely to be the case for residents who did not know many people locally and/or were single.
- did not want to socially interact with other residents. Some people chose to avoid third places precisely because they were places where social interaction was likely to happen.

> *"Everybody keeps themselves to themselves, that's what I like about it"*
> (Grace, 25-29, Grimsby)

The research highlights the importance of checking any decline in the quantity and quality of third places in deprived neighbourhoods. Policy and practice, especially in

the context of regeneration, needs to recognise the importance of the broader social and physical *contextual* attributes of neighbourhoods subject to intervention.

This summary, by Paul Hickman, is based on a full working paper that is available here:
http://research.shu.ac.uk/cresr/living-through-change/documents/ThirdPlaces.pdf

6. Family, friends and neighbours: Social relations and support

Key Points:

- Family and friends can provide intimate, sustained and committed forms of support that enable people to manage the daily, immediate challenges of experiencing poverty. Three broad forms of sustenance or income were found in the case study neighbourhoods: transfer payments (financial gifts or loans); services and practical help (such as child care); and emotional and social support.

- Asked about neighbours, residents were more likely to describe a commitment to look out for others, to provide practical support, and to engage in social contact. Practical examples of such transactions were rarer. Some, particularly younger, people were ambivalent about neighbourly relations, preferring to 'keep themselves to themselves'.

- Bonds, attachments and transactions between family members, friends and neighbours were variable. This was associated with the interplay of numerous individual and place-based factors. Individual factors included: residential history and geography of mobility; current and previous engagement in work, education and training; parental responsibilities; personal resources; and disposition. Place-based factors included: turnover and residential stability; the social and physical characteristics of place; and collective social functioning.

- These simple findings about real-life complexity challenge claims that deprivation can be reversed by fostering stronger social bonds at neighbourhood level. 'Neighbourly' communities cannot simply be willed into being if some residents are disinclined to invest time in getting to know others, or if the material and social specifics of a place mediate against their formation.

There is a tendency for policy discourses to portray deprived or low income neighbourhoods as problematic places, where internally cohesive and segregated communities nurture dispositions and behaviours that deviate from social and cultural norms. This characterisation does not always acknowledge that deprived neighbourhoods can be home to sets of relationships that constitute a resource pool from which people can draw support and that help them to 'get by' in the face of disadvantage and inequality.

> *"Oh yes, they'll* [grandchildren] *be coming down tonight … I 'ave them over the weekend cos me son's wife she works late and then sometimes I have to go and baby-sit because he works on the taxis … so I go and do me little bit and help out because 'er mum has them of a day if you know what I mean, when she's at work..."*
> (Winnie, retired, Knowsley)

This research found that the availability and nature of placed-based relationships and the benefits that accrue to local residents engaged in local networks, varied between the neighbourhoods studied.

In three case studies it appeared that the mutual support and exchange that used to characterise relationships between family, friends and neighbours had come under pressure and been hollowed out, prompting individuals to forge more inward-looking relationships (so-called 'bonding capital') with family and friends only. However, in the three other case studies, there were numerous examples of neighbours who were also friends and relatives, and neighbour relations were frequently underpinned by strong bonds, resulting in the exchange of a full range of support and assistance.

These findings appear to support two countervailing arguments. On the one hand, the 'less neighbourly' case studies appeared to be consistent with the conclusion that private bonds have become more important, and that family and friends rather than neighbours, provide the most important source of support for 'getting by'.

> *"No I don't want to be going round for cups of tea and that kind of thing, the people I'm friends with are the people that I've chosen to be friends with and actually there might be some very nice people amongst my neighbours that I would like to be friends with but equally I don't know... there just doesn't seem to be enough time to socialise with the people I socialise with, family and friends as it is..."*
> (Waseem, West London)

On the other, the 'more neighbourly' case studies confirmed the counter argument that strong and intimate relationships do still often exist between neighbours and are rooted in and sustained by the need for support and assistance in the face of social and financial hardship

However, the findings also suggest that an important caveat needs to be attached to either conclusion; neighbours matter for some people in some places, but the situation varies depending upon both the individual *and* upon the nature of the place where they live.

These findings raise a number of implications for those concerned with the potential for the restitution of social networks to revitalise disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Firstly, the fact that family, friends and neighbouring matter in different ways to different people complicates the simplistic notion that deprivation can somehow be reversed by fostering stronger social bonds at the neighbourhood level. Secondly, the propensity to forge strong social ties and productive friendships with neighbours is linked to the nature of a place. This suggests, for example, that in some places, fostering a 'Big Society' will first require interventions to tackle the material and social conditions that constrain possibilities for forming social relationships.

This summary, by David Robinson and Richard Crisp, is based on a full working paper that is available here: http://research.shu.ac.uk/cresr/living-through-change/documents/RP9FamilyFriendsandNeighbours.pdf

7. Social mix: Contrasting experiences in four neighbourhoods

Key Points:

- Two main mechanisms whereby lower income residents might be expected to benefit from living in a more socially mixed neighbourhood are through shared social resources and social interaction.

- Patterns of neighbourhood change differed in the extent to which they helped to maintain shared space. This was a crucial factor affecting the views and experiences of different social and ethnic groups.

- One neighbourhood had suffered from serious delays in delivering an ambitious masterplan of housing renewal and tenure diversification. This compounded ongoing processes of dispersal, disruption and loss.

- The carefully phased and sympathetic redevelopment of another neighbourhood had helped to generate more positive views about the heterogeneity of the area and fewer signs of conflict between the two dominant ethnic groups locally.

- The most ethnically, socially and economically mixed case study was in Inner London. Here, local diversity was rarely noted by residents although several respondents with a more localised lifestyle and outlook felt isolated and more resentful of newcomers. This neighbourhood is facing the prospect of major redevelopment intended to produce more 'mixed and balanced' communities.

- There can be a gap between policy rhetoric on social mix and residents' experiences at neighbourhood level. The area that had received a battery of measures to promote greater tenure and income diversity has been marked by increasing fragmentation and division. The existing community in the ostensibly most mixed neighbourhood will be displaced if plans for redevelopment come to fruition.

The question of the differential impact of the social and economic composition of the neighbourhood on the experiences and perceptions of households living on low incomes has become well-trodden terrain in both policy analysis and academic debate over recent years. Does the spatial concentration of households living in poverty compound their disadvantage? Does living in more mixed communities, whether on the basis of income, employment, tenure or ethnicity, provide more opportunities for people to find employment, achieve better outcomes at school, and climb out of poverty?

This summary is based directly on the perceptions and experiences of residents themselves rather than sifting through social mix changes as denoted by a range of local social indicators. The research wanted to uncover how residents saw the impact of different social and ethnic groups on how their neighbourhood had changed; the impact of policy measures designed to alter the residential profile of the areas; and whether local diversity was seen as an asset or a source of conflict.

The contrasts between the four neighbourhoods proved to be as illuminating as any similarities, and counsel strongly against any blanket assessments of social mix and neighbourhood sustainability. A more differentiated and nuanced approach is advocated.

The analysis questions explanations that rely solely on the concentration of certain attributes of the resident population at the neighbourhood level or in the degree of connectivity to opportunities outside the neighbourhood. It suggests that a reading of how the neighbourhood is judged to have changed, the perceived level of 'investment' in the area by both long-standing residents and relative newcomers, and the perceived impact of in- and out-migration over a longer period of time can all help to explain whether the existence of different social and cultural groups in the locality is viewed as a source of tension or renewal.

> *"It's obviously become far more cosmopolitan in the last fifteen years so you've got a reflection of the diversity of London living on the estate*."
> (Anthony, aged 30-34, West London)

> *"... it's more or less the same people that's here apart from the transient. That's a transient house up the top flat there as well but that's been empty for about three months. People and that come in and stay for two or three months and all that and disappear again and now it's empty again"*
> *(*Roy, aged 45-64, Edinburgh)

A closer understanding is required of the *processes* whereby living in a disadvantaged neighbourhood can shape the outlooks and actions of the residents in order to get to grips with the connections between neighbourhood circumstances and individual outcomes across a range of factors. A qualitative approach can illuminate issues that may remain in the shade through even the most sophisticated statistical model.

The approach indicated how area characteristics of similarity and difference, of connectivity and conflict, are elicited from studying *narratives of neighbourhood*

change given by residents themselves, not least the impact of ongoing in- and out-migration on their attitudes and experiences. The narratives of change differed sharply from one neighbourhood to the next in ways that could not have been assessed by examining statistical differences between them.

This summary, by Ian Cole and Stephen Green, is based on a working paper available at: http://research.shu.ac.uk/cresr/living-through-change/documents/NeighbourhoodSocialMix.pdf

8. Perceptions of neighbourhood change and its impacts

Key Points:

- Residents' perceptions of the scale, nature and impacts of neighbourhood changes varied. This differentiation occurred within, as well as between, neighbourhoods, driven by a range of individual factors influencing perceptions of change.

- Many residents perceived simultaneous positive and negative elements of neighbourhood change. A sense of improvement and high levels of satisfaction coincided with the identification of continuing neighbourhood problems and a wider sense of neighbourhood decline.

- People spoke about neighbourhood change over extended historical periods and also recounted rapid change over very short time scales. Changes were also identified at various spatial scales, ranging from individual blocks of properties to the city or regional level.

- Residents identified a range of drivers, indicators and symbols of neighbourhood change, including the local economy, housing and the physical environment, population change, retail and services provision and crime.

- Residents indicated that enhanced neighbourhood infrastructure (retail outlets, public space, transport links, facilities for children, and policing) would make a significant positive improvement to their lives. This suggests a need for a basic minimum physical and services infrastructure standard for neighbourhoods. Public services provision is a core component of this.

- Place matters in the experience of poverty in Britain. When neighbourhoods experience substantial change, there are significant impacts for people living on lower incomes. Residents often view their future life opportunities as being intimately connected to changes occurring within their existing neighbourhood.

One of the objectives of the project was to complement existing quantitative data about neighbourhood change by capturing the diversity, complexity and nuances within individual accounts of change and its impacts. The findings confirm wide variation in perceptions, driven both by individual factors (age, gender, length of residence, orientation to change) and actual processes of change occurring in their neighbourhoods.

The findings suggest that the narrative often apparent in policy discussions overstates negative perceptions of deprived neighbourhoods. Amongst respondents, a sense of decline or desire to leave were countered by, or coincided with, high levels of social and emotional connections to a neighbourhood, satisfaction with the locality, and a sense of area improvement.

> *"There's a lot more buzz in Amlwch at the moment … there's a new initiative called Age Well, it's a fantastic idea, it's in the Memorial Hall and again you're seeing a lot of elderly people coming out now that you would never have seen before"*
> (Jack, 45-64, Anglesey)

Individual residents contextualised change through multiple time-frames, through different spatial scales, and through personal circumstances. This diversity amongst people living in a single neighbourhood creates challenges for capturing a 'community view' and reveals the limitations of existing research mechanisms. This was particularly evident in the range of views expressed about the desirability and outcomes of regeneration initiatives.

Residents link neighbourhood change to wider forces, including the economy, housing supply (including, for social housing, associated lettings policies) and migration; neighbourhood renewal is almost always dependent upon such external factors:

> *"Where's your economy? ... You see the thing is they need to develop the people along with the plans, because there is funding the people as communities can access but if they're not developing the people along with the project, where's your sustainability?"*
> (Irene, retired, Edinburgh)

In one case study, where development had come to a halt as a result of the market down-turn, the damage to social and physical infrastructure was very evident. In another neighbourhood, regeneration was linked to a growing sense of local progress and attachment to place.

A key finding was the depth of historical, social and emotional connection that residents have to where they live. The majority of residents saw their future life opportunities being intimately linked to their neighbourhood and its fortunes. This casts doubts on the feasibility of the current policy focus on housing and labour market mobility as a response to poverty; rather, it emphasises the centrality of neighbourhood change. However, despite the significance of its impact on their lives, residents may feel - and be - largely powerless to affect such processes.

A major conclusion is that deprived neighbourhoods should have a minimum social and physical 'place' infrastructure. On one level this requires maximising the use of existing community facilities and services and maintaining good quality housing and physical environments. On another, it means measures to ensure access to basic retail provision (such as grocery stores, post offices, pharmacies) and adequate transport links. This will require sufficient public services investment *and* mechanisms to address lack of private sector provision. Whilst a 'Big Society' of strong communities and voluntary endeavour is crucial to the life experiences of those on low incomes, this will not be generated at the neighbourhood level without public and private sectors playing full and meaningful roles.

This summary, by Nadia Bashir and John Flint, is based on a full working paper available here: http://research.shu.ac.uk/cresr/living-through-change/documents/NeighbourhoodChange.pdf