

The World in our Neighbourhood

The Young Foundation's Transforming Neighbourhoods carried out practical work in over 15 local authority areas between 2005 and 2007, including London boroughs, northern cities and rural counties. These projects explored the dynamics of community engagement, looking at the experience of both local authorities and other public sector agencies trying to develop new approaches and challenge their own centralised corporate culture; and also at the perspectives of community organisations and residents, working to increase voice, influence (and in some cases control) in their neighbourhoods and communities.

Our experience is that in many areas the impact of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity is a significant complicating factor for community organisations and agencies trying to improve neighbourhood working. This is particular acute in areas like Haringey where the diversity of the local population has increased dramatically in recent years.

One study found that the N15, or South Tottenham, postcode in Haringey was the most diverse in the country. The borough is home to an estimated 106 ethnic groups, who have travelled to London from countries including Afghanistan and Zimbabwe. One explanation for this is that unlike other parts of London, Tottenham is not perceived to be home to any one dominant minority group. This has opened up opportunities for smaller communities to move into the area to find a new home¹.

The Young Foundation worked with the London Borough of Haringey's neighbourhood management team to encourage a more open discussion about the impact of diversity on neighbourhoods. It is important to develop new approaches that give agencies and residents the skills and competencies needed to work within this complex situation, and to bring this issue to the fore within current discussions of localism.

¹ Professor Richard Webber, UCL, for the Origins Info report, 2006

This briefing sets out the background to the issues

1 Diversity is often a strength; what happens when it becomes a problem?

We have encountered many examples where failure to acknowledge the complexity of diversity amongst local neighbourhoods complicates and hinders the effectiveness of resident action; the work of community groups; and the strategies and actions of local agencies.

The negative impact of high diversity at the neighbourhood level can mean that:

- strain is placed on public services trying to meet newly emerging needs
- tensions build up within communities over resource allocation - particularly between longstanding (white or black) residents and newer arrivals - leading to politicisation of very local issues
- conflicts play out through violence particularly among young people
- particular groups become demonised – especially recent arrivals
- white working class people becoming increasingly alienated and residualised.

The tensions between different communities in the UK today go beyond traditional definitions of 'race relations'. At the neighbourhood level, race, ethnicity, culture, class and faith all overlap and interrelate. New pressures grow out of events at the local, citywide, national and global level, including the threat of international terrorism.

Living with diversity demands skills to balance the need to share common spaces and experiences with the need to maintain separate identities. These skills are required by residents wanting to get along with neighbours, or parents dealing with social relationships in the playground, and by front line staff and decision makers needing to develop a full understanding of local needs and potential tensions. Globalisation and international conflicts have raised the stakes when community tensions build up, the consequences of getting it wrong have never been higher.

2 What is the relationship between disadvantage and ethnicity?

In many deprived areas in the UK there are large ethnic minority populations, and some minorities are disproportionately represented in the poorest areas. However the relationship between ethnicity and disadvantage is far from simple: in some very disadvantaged neighbourhoods the population is almost exclusively white, and some of the UK's wealthiest areas, including in London, now have diverse populations.

The most recent Family Resources Survey, a national survey of household incomes, found that minority ethnic groups are generally located in areas where incomes are low and unemployment is high. More than half of African-Caribbean and Africans and over a third of South Asians live in districts with the highest rates of unemployment.

This data also suggests a clear association between the density of minority ethnic population and the level of minority ethnic income. In particular, income levels of Chinese and Indian households who lived in areas of high minority ethnic concentration were much lower than Indian and Chinese households living in predominately white areas².

3 Has ethnic diversity changed?

The UK's ethnic minority population is no longer characterised by a homogenous 'black' population. In recent years, the number of different nationalities has increased. It is now ten years since the last census (in 2001), and official statistics have yet to catch up with changes in immigration patterns in this period (for example missing out on the 400,000-plus Poles who have registered to work in Britain since May 2004). In addition to this illegal migrants are uncounted. This is challenging for service providers: East London and City Heath Authority have estimated that the population of their area is 30 - 40,000 more than official census figures, however resources are still allocated on the basis of the lower census estimate.

Sheffield's black and minority ethnic population was recorded as slightly over ten per cent in the 2001 census. By 2005 this figure is estimated to have risen to around 15 per cent. In the same year, nearly a quarter of children starting primary school and nearly 30 per cent of births were to people from black and minority ethnic groups³.

The economic experience of being from a black or minority ethnic group in the UK is now also far from uniform. Overall a smaller proportion of people of working age from ethnic minority groups are in work compared to the white population. However some

² Family Resources Survey - DWP, Households Below Average Income: An analysis of the income distribution 2008/09

³ Sheffield City Council statistics

communities including people of Indian and Chinese origin now fare well (and better than average) in schools, higher education and the labour market although still with an 'ethnic penalty' of discrimination which means that on average they don't do as well as their skills level would imply⁴.

The Family Resources Survey found that people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin represent the poorest groups on virtually every measure. At the other end of the scale, Chinese and Indian people have amongst the highest levels of income in every type of area⁵. A review by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, on the same findings from an earlier survey, concluded that levels of income are influenced less by where people from minority ethnic groups live now, but more by individual's countries of origin⁶.

New communications technologies also impact on the relationship people have with the neighbourhood where they live. It is easier now than it has ever been to keep up relationships with people elsewhere, whether that is the other side of the City, of the UK or on another continent. Good communications and cheaper international air travel also mean that people can return more easily to their homelands. The result can be that sometimes people with strong ties to other countries may identify less with their immediate neighbourhood than more longstanding residents.

So - the experiences of different people who come to the UK to live varies enormously. Within every group, individuals juggle multiple identities, with class, faith, sexuality, education, and experience of life all affecting the ways they relate to British institutions and culture. People also come to the UK with different aspirations: the global super rich because of UK tax laws and because of the financial services industry; many well qualified younger people seek new experiences and job opportunities, sometimes staying for short periods of time. An unknown - but significant - number of people come with few assets, in search of economic opportunities and a better life. Other people arrive in need - over nearly 30,000 asylum applications were made in 2010⁷ - or as victims of trafficking and slavery.

4 Is segregation of different ethnic groups increasing?

A study by the University of Manchester found that British society is becoming more mixed, not more segregated, with the number of 'mixed' neighbourhoods increasing from 864 to 1,070 in the decade to 2001, and an estimated 1,300 by 2011 — one in five throughout England.⁸ One in ten children in the UK today now live in a mixed-race

⁴ CRE factfile

⁵ Family Resources Survey - DWP, Households Below Average Income: An analysis of the income distribution 2008/09

⁶ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Foundations: Ethnic diversity, neighbourhoods and housing, February 2000

⁷ Home Office, Monthly Asylum Statistics- May 2010

⁸ Dr Ludi Simpson, Statistics of Racial Segregation: Measures, Evidence and Policy: Urban Studies, Vol. 41, No. 3, 661–681, March 2004, Carfax publishing, Taylor & Francis Group.

family, and young people are six times more likely to be mixed race than adults.⁹

Affluence affects where people choose to live: the overall trend is that regardless of ethnicity, as people become more successful, they move to more prosperous neighbourhoods away from inner city deprivation. What is often called 'white flight' from the multi racial inner city should more accurately be seen as the flight of the successful to the more comfortable suburbs.

However alongside the overall trend of dispersal, both newly arrived migrants and more longstanding deprived communities continue to cluster in areas where poverty and disadvantage dominate. This is fuelled not only by people's understandable wish to be near others who share the same history, language, faith and culture, but also by external factors. For those dependent on the private sector, particularly for housing, choices in practice are limited to low cost low rent disadvantaged areas. For people who rely on social welfare provision - again housing is key - the reality of rationing of scarce housing resources means that people with the greatest needs and little ability to wait for a better offer are likely to move to the most damaged and deprived areas of social housing. Whilst supply shortages of low cost housing persist this situation will remain, regardless of well-intentioned efforts to increase choice within the social housing sector.

Segregation can also be very visible in schools.; in Tower Hamlets in 2002 17 schools had over 90 per cent Bangladeshi children¹⁰. This has partly been fuelled by parental choice but the complete explanation is more complex. A more important factor is the impact of social housing allocation policies on poorer Bangladeshis. These have concentrated this community into particular areas, with the consequence that their children are sent to a small number of schools in these parts of the borough. The ability of more settled and affluent populations to navigate schools admissions policies and exercise more control over their choice of school compounds these trends. The situation is now being further complicated by the impact of a new wave of migrants in the borough - newly arrived Eastern European Catholic families - who are now queuing for places at local Catholic schools.

But, in spite of the statistical evidence about segregation the widespread perception is that geographical separation between different ethnic groups is increasing. Fears that segregation and separateness are out of control is articulated at different levels: amongst policy makers and politicians, in the popular press, and in neighbourhood gossip and rumour. There has been debate about whether multiculturalism has gone 'too far', whether the UK is 'too diverse'. Trevor Phillips, Chair of the Government's Commission for Racial Equality warned in 2005 that the UK is 'sleepwalking into

⁹ ISER at Essex University study, cited in *Revealed: the rise of mixed-race Britain*, Anushka Asthana and David Smith, The Observer, Sunday 18 January 2009

¹⁰ Geoff Dench and Geoff Mulgan, Kate Gavron, The New East End. Profile Books, 2006

segregation¹¹ (although he subsequently acknowledged that he had misinterpreted the research on which his remarks were based).

But other voices stress the benefits of diversity, bringing dynamism, new entrepreneurs, new cultural mixes and skills, and contributing to the economy, the cultural life and the energy of local communities.

5 What do the experts tell us?

Robert Putnam - whose work on the atomisation of US society has been highly influential - has written recently about the corrosive effects of ethnic diversity on trust. He has argued that the more diverse a community is, the less likely its inhabitants are to trust anyone, from their next-door neighbour to the mayor. When his data was adjusted for class, income and other factors, it showed that the more people of different races lived in the same community, the greater the loss of trust¹².

However, recent government survey research in the UK suggests a different story. The data shows that people who live in multi-ethnic areas, and people with friends from different ethnic groups to themselves, tend to have the most positive views about the level of racial prejudice, and more positive views about services and institutions.¹³ Other studies have established that while London is the UK's most multicultural region, polling consistently also shows that it is the region in the UK that is most comfortable with diversity¹⁴.

Research by Irene Bruegel and Susie Weller of London South Bank University found that in primary school classes where at least a third of the children were from minority backgrounds there was far greater evidence of mixed ethnicity friendships carrying over to secondary school than in schools where larger proportions of children were white. The research also found that sessions arranged to mix children from primary schools with different ethnic compositions had less positive effect than day to day contact: white children who had been to through this process referred to the children they met as 'coming from the brown school' and could not remember their names because they were 'too difficult'¹⁵.

Oxford Professor of Psychology and Young Foundation Fellow Miles Hewstone, has explored what happens to relationships between different groups in conflict areas. His research - in Northern Ireland, areas of Hindu-Muslim conflict in India and in former Yugoslavia - has established that when people have more contact with people from other backgrounds, understanding increases and hostility reduces. This challenges the

¹¹ in a speech made in Manchester in September 2005

¹² John Lloyd, Study paints bleak picture of ethnic diversity, Financial Times, October 2006

¹³ Source: Sarah Kitchen, Juliet Michaelson, Natasha Wood, Peter John, Citizenship Survey: Cross-cutting themes, DCLG June 2006

¹⁴ Home Office, Monthly Asylum Statistics- May 2010

¹⁵ Irene Bruegel and Susie Weller Ethnically mixed primary classes are the key to improved social cohesion, ESRC, August 2006

more popularly accepted (within the UK) 'threat' theory which proposes that more diversity leads to more misunderstanding and competition, and increased prejudice. Hewstone's work suggests the opposite, that so long as there is contact (which isn't always the case) diverse populations can develop understanding and less discomfort between different groups¹⁶.

6 Managing the impact of diversity at the neighbourhood level

For centuries the UK has absorbed waves of newcomers from different countries, from the Huguenots, different seafaring nationalities, and escaped slaves from the Caribbean and USA in the 18th and 19th centuries, to mass migration in the 20th century. In general people in this country are more at ease with diversity than in many comparable countries. A stark example of this is the reaction, in 2005, to the Danish cartoons that inflamed Muslim opinion in many European countries. In the UK these were debated and opposed, but no newspaper actually published them.

However the reality is that in many parts of the country there are now unprecedented numbers of different communities, and many people now live in neighbourhoods with no shared lifestyle, culture or faith. The key question is whether - in these times of international terrorism and global tensions - we can rely on our past record of tolerance, integration and common sense to help us muddle through the contradictions of living in increasingly diverse communities, or whether we need to pay more attention to managing and developing the skills and practices needed to promote meaningful integration that doesn't stifle difference.

This briefing ends with a practical example of work in Tottenham, in the London Borough of Haringey. This illustrates the sort of positive, creative, local approach that we have found in our work with local authorities and community groups on neighbourhoods and community engagement.

Haringey's Area Assemblies have piloted sessions where different communities give presentations about their experience of living in Haringey, their history and the circumstances of their arrival in North London. This grew out of an attempt to try and attract more people to the Area Assemblies which, like many similar initiatives, were struggling to attract participants.

¹⁶ Young Foundation lunchtime seminar summer 2006.

In Tottenham, in spite of the very mixed population, Assemblies were usually attended by white people. It was agreed that a priority would be to try to find a way of attracting the communities that don't usually engage with Council activities or consultation processes. Assemblies are structured so that there is a tea break at the halfway point, to encourage people to talk to each other and it was noticeable that the residents who came always enjoyed any biscuits provided. So food became a feature of the new initiative, being aware that many people have strong traditions of hospitality on the one hand, and food is often a barrier between different races on the other. The new agenda slot was called "meet the neighbours".

Established community organisation are invited to come along and to make a short presentation about their origins, the motivating factors that brought them to Tottenham, the things that concern them and their aspirations for their families. The neighbourhood manager pays for organisations presenting to bring along a selection of snacks from their own culinary traditions. This is presented as the community organisation bringing along some food for their neighbours to share.

Two communities - Somali and Sierra Leonian - have done this so far. Highlights have included hearing a young Somali man explaining the intricacies of British and Italian colonialism on the Horn of Africa and how parts of Somalia were taken over by Djibouti and Eritrea. People gather round the food and the community group explains what each dish is and how it is made.

The neighbourhood manager feels it has changed the face of Assembly meetings, has encouraged communities that often feel quite embattled and marginalised to talk to other people about aspects of their culture and vice versa, and increased the number of people who are likely to get involved in the Assemblies. The next Assembly in March will hear from Columbian or Polish community groups.

About this paper

This paper was written by Nicola Bacon.

It was first published by the Young Foundation in 2006 as a background paper for a conference organized with LB Haringey to explore the impact of diversity on neighbourhood working.

This was one element of the broader Transforming Neighbourhoods programme, a research and innovation consortium on neighbourhood governance and empowerment that ran from 2006 to 2008. It brought together government departments, community and research organisations. Partners included the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Home Office, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, CAGE, The Community Alliance and 15 local authorities including Birmingham, Camden, Haringey, Knowsley, Lewisham, Liverpool, Newham, Sheffield, Staffordshire, Suffolk, Surrey, Tower Hamlets, Wakefield, Waltham Forest and Wiltshire

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