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Common Knowledge

Community development and communication on a housing estate

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Start here	Start here
Here are some people who inhabit a shared space on the planet. They have different backgrounds, different experiences, different expectations. A few figures walk purposefully but unhurriedly, to the temple or to fetch kids from school, to catch a bus elsewhere or buy groceries. Few residents seem to know others around them, but there are occasional greetings.	Here's an unremarkable urban landscape a few miles from central London. There's no café society here, no bustling markets or pub life, no traders stimulating interactions on the pavements. There are no tower blocks either, no traditional tenement housing, just a mix of post-war two and three-storey houses and flats.
It's early in the twenty-first century and conditions are challenging for many people here. Some of the housing is in a poor state and there are associated health problems. A thriving drugs culture is evident, there are reports of muggings, disorder is evident in most parts of the estate, services such as cleaning and housing are disparaged and the police responsiveness is slight to the point of insignificance. There is a sense of retreat and resignation.	This is not a suburb, it's an outer urban estate, not far from a thriving multicultural urban centre. But the modern images of urbanism – autonomous mobility, fashion, art, media, cafes, pedestrian bustle, confident clothing and confident voices – simply don't apply here. Assertion is atomised, not collective; diversity is fragmentary, not re-enforcing. All life here is everyday life. What kind of urbanism is this, that seems so successfully to stifle cultural lives?
Of course, people tend to experience these sorts of difficulties in a personal way, but if they try to bring about change, they generally find that as individuals they can have little impact. The collective imperative has to be recognised, or little will change except where one or two people get a breakthrough, attract attention, get moved to a larger flat perhaps. For those who don't know someone who knows what to do, who to call, what the letter really means – the problems accumulate and the experience remains personal.	There is no tussle going on between the public and the private for domination of the spaces. The civic is not challenging enterprise here. These spaces are not contested and little value is attached to their public occupation. These are not places to linger. This is reactive living, people are relentlessly coping with the circumstances in which they find themselves. It's a profound and unspectacular disempowerment, reflecting and reflected in the unambitious design, the failed architecture, the eerie built-up quiet, the civic absence.
Where there can be a collective view on the difficulties, it takes time and energy with no guarantee of success. People who commit as activists may have to start by investing in trust among themselves, which can be hard enough and exhausting. Then they must start trusting others – intermediaries, professionals, managers, community development workers.	Look more closely and read the signs. The guttering from this ill-designed garage overhang, unrepaired for some time. Few lights along this walkway are working. There's rubbish building up there by the wall, and filth spilled from a bin-liner on the stairway. The stench makes you gasp. The space between these flats, originally with play equipment, now quite bare and sullen. The graffiti are marginalia.

Some residents believe they have rights to certain provision (a decent home, accessible health services or children's play facilities) from the society of which they strive to be a part. But they struggle for meaningful dialogue with the gatekeepers of those entitlements. Distance is noise. Often language difficulties bewilder them, and the accumulation of complex problems soon defeats any momentum they may have built up. Anger unharnessed soon dissipates.	Trade provokes social interaction, it should be a lubricant for encounters. But it's quiet here, queues don't form in the shops and the kids hanging out on the pavement have little to spend except time. They kick around the boxes outside the store. What's not happening here is consumption. Some religious activists are working to build up an audience over time. But the forces of disorder, the insidious menace of drugs, have already taken hold.
Small-scale, piecemeal community development isn't really community development at all. It will have minimal impact if the residents are unable to present an informed collective view of their situation. And yet such a coordinated view of life-where-it-is-lived – as opposed to life where it is viewed from bureaucracy – is fundamental if residents are to bring about change.	Housing regeneration has been long-promised, and the residents are in the feasibility stage of a tenant management process. For some, the waiting is problematic: if the housing will be taken down in a few years' time, the landlord won't be inclined to invest in the windows or the heating, no-one will fix the lighting or bother to keep the place clean.
How do the people who live here construct a shared view of the world, how do they articulate collectively their common knowledge?	How do we understand the relation between this version of urban life, and the magazine version? What are the missing ingredients of urban neighbourhood life?
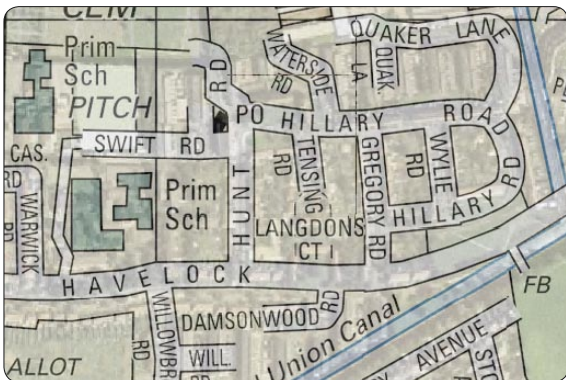
Space and place

Residents will tell you there's only one way into and out of the estate and that's a problem. Havelock is confined on two sides by canals and on a third by a cemetery and a closed industrial estate, beyond which is the east-west main railway from London Paddington. There are paths and a footbridge, but few people seem to pass through this neighbourhood. You might go to Havelock and you might get stuck here.

Residents experienced the traumatic death by burning of one of their number, on a day when the estate was blocked with visitors to a cultural festival. The ambulance could not get through, by the time a helicopter arrived it was too late. As a consequence, people speak with passion of the need for another access road. Some like the quiet, but they are also aware of the dangers of social and economic insularism.

Havelock had its heyday and is still felt by some to be the best residential location around Southall, at least in terms of connections to other places. Southall is widely praised for its vitality and diversity, a ceaseless colourful festival of life.

"Outsiders are actually very important in determining neighbourhood quality… Frequent passers-by of the right type can increase residents' sense of security… Passing pedestrians have less sense of ownership and are likely to enjoy neighbourhood benefits with less inclination to abide by the codes that help to sustain them."
(Webster 2003, p2609)

But this estate feels neglected and abandoned. There is no clinic, no dentist, no library, no police station, no pub, no mosque or temple or church. A row of shuttered shops cling to economic survival with a grim and beaten look. Among them, the community shop is also shuttered much of the time. A community development worker is reported to be assigned to the estate, but is seldom seen. A quarter of a mile from the shop, the Family Centre, also slightly barricaded, holds a dependable reputation and fields many general enquiries about everyday difficulties. People's problems sometimes get washed up here on a listless community current, that somehow picks up personal or family concerns and turns them over, as if asking where they belong.

There are speed bumps on the most used roads. There are small trees, and green patches with the sign 'no ball games' much honoured in the breach. There's a well-used path beside the canal, and a neglected garden, intended for older people, with a broken gate and scattered rubbish. As you walk around you notice broken things – drain lids, pavement slabs, street lights, gutters, fences, door locks, windows.

The inadequate lighting is a recurring theme. Trapped in a dark corner, one resident lost the sight in one eye in a mugging incident four years ago. The paths remain poorly lit. It takes tenacity to keep reporting where the lights are out.

"More benches and lights for chillin."
"More lighting in alleys."
"Trees too tall… Lop trees to allow lighting on path."
(Mapping exercise)

While numerous residents mention problems with the rubbish chutes in the blocks, no-one mentions the fly-tipping, but the piles appear, in different places, sometimes quite strikingly scattered about. A large discarded sofa, a bag of old clothes too small for the kids now, chairs and tables, a crate of packaged sandwiches beyond their sell-by date. You don't want to look too closely.

We forget the conditions under which such estates were built – conditions of large-scale structured council housing which assumed a level of ongoing maintenance from service providers.

"For this environment to function at all it actually requires people to conform to a very high level of what is seen by the governing institutions as reasonable behaviour, and in conjunction with this it also demands the availability of economic and manpower resources to keep it all together and operating." (Willats 2001, p39)

People tend to experience their difficulties in a very personal way and may not see problems as collectively experienced and susceptible to collective solutions. Residents used post-its during an open day to record 'community' issues, and some were quite specific.

To build a collective response requires a healthy ecology of opportunities and occasions, for the exchange of informal and formal information. Connections with others have

Repring
Heating
Mice

BroKen Door
on WiLLoW BrooK
RoAD,
ToiLet Seat
BroKen Wash
BasiN
(Mapping exercise)

to be established and they have to recur, their trivial ephemerality accumulating from the dismissed mundane to become a potentially formidable resource which can be drawn on in time of need.
"If information flow drops below certain critical levels, the local information ecology is vulnerable and information stagnation sets in. Levels of face-recognition drop significantly, people stop receiving information (they may stop sharing it), relatively little information goes out of the locality, and the neighbourhood could begin to atrophy." (Harris 1999, p70)

I walked with Mr P past his flat, where there is a small green open space. He wants the space reserved for residents, he would like there to be a fence where the wall is broken, and some lighting,
"The outside boys, they come here, they kick it, they push down the walls…
This was all walls here, they come here, they kick it, they destroy these walls."

There are two primary schools on Havelock, both well regarded. Roughly between them lies a large fenced sports field, comprising a full sized all-weather football or hockey pitch. This is used occasionally by one of the schools, but is currently closed to community use, apparently because of reported contaminated ground beneath the surface. There have been talks about renovating it. I discussed it with one of the residents' committee members:

KH.   *Now supposing this had been renovated, it was really heavily used, you'd overcome the community management issues and so on, it was thriving, it would attract a constituency of users from far wider than Havelock. Have you thought about that as an issue?*

Mr M. *Indeed. They could use it as a football ground, as a cricket ground, hockey ground, there's a lot of interest, and not only is that Havelock, the whole of Southall, Ealing… They used to have football matches here and there's a lot of interest in Ealing or in Southall, for the sport at a professional level. But in order to get it going, somebody has to make that move.*

KH.   *So there's obviously a willingness within Havelock to have that kind of resource here, that would attract people from outside…*

Mr M. *Absolutely, because it's on our ground, on the Havelock estate, it's ideal for them to develop it.[1]*

Across on the other side of the estate, there is a small play area, manifestly inadequate: as Mr G puts it simply, "850 houses, two swings." It's obviously too far from much of the estate, for young children of the appropriate age, to go on their own. The residents' organisation has been working with Groundwork West London on the funding for and design of a new play space. Committee members are confident that this "will bring the community together, people from different backgrounds."

Community presence, informal connections

Parts of Havelock look pleasant and well-kept. They reassure the hesitant outsider. One resident jokily envies another's flat in a quiet fenced court, which overlooks a garden with railings and unlocked gates. But at the back of this court you can see the cracked walls, the broken gutters, the drains that have been blocked for years. Elsewhere there are trees around recently repainted semi-detached houses, and grass spaces on both sides of Hillary Road. There is genuine open space before you get to the canal, and an unmarked field beside allotments.

But there are neglected and confused spaces, spaces of uncertainty, wherever you turn, spaces that do not obey any economic use, that are not programmed. (Cupers and Miessen 2002) The Havelock estate feels impersonal and this is not what you might expect. It's not a small estate, so there probably isn't as high a percentage of face recognition as we might predict. The impression is that people are moving around quite a lot on a very local basis, within the neighbourhood, but not greeting or acknowledging many of the people they see. If you have relatively low levels of residential stability, few places or occasions to meet and stop for a chat, where it doesn't feel safe and where residents show little satisfaction with the police, you are likely to have weak community presence and poor informal social control.

> *"The effect of personal ties is severely tempered in predominantly mixed and predominantly minority neighbourhoods, such that personal ties have an insignificant impact on crime." (Warner and Wilcox Rountree 1997, p533)*

In such a neighbourhood people may also struggle to develop successful ties with external agencies, or to establish community participation and involvement in regeneration. We organised a visit by government officials in spring 2006. A small number of residents, including several parents of young children, came along to talk about life on the estate, and for a cold walkabout in the early evening. Our discussions suggested strongly that people sense a crisis of community presence. Failure to be visible as residents, as occupiers of this territory, favours those who thrive on disorder, and it could be disastrous. Presence means that a neighbourhood is inhabited and occupied, its places and spaces are used and valued, and local people expect visitors to respect them.

> *"Even when personal ties are strong in areas of concentrated disadvantage, daily experiences with distrust, fear of strangers, uncertainty, and economic dependency are likely to reduce expectations for taking effective collective action."*
> *(Sampson et al 1999, p637)*

To establish or restore community presence requires a level of collective confidence. It comes from a sense of ownership which is hard to accomplish without the responsiveness and support of service providers. Confidence is apparent where local people are ready and willing to articulate their concerns and needs and how they feel about their locality, themselves - including expressing pride in it and celebrating their strengths. On Havelock, a few resolute local people serve on the committee of their residents' organisation and try to assert this confidence, but it is not self-regenerating and is exhausting to sustain without results.

An elderly man came in to the community shop while a meeting was going on. The residents invited him to sit down, they gave him time to speak and heard his story.

His manner was quiet and dignified and his words were clear. He has lived on the estate for 30 years. He told us how he had been attacked several times by a young woman, who swore at him and accused him of following her. He sought help from a neighbour but she said "I don't mix with the bullies." He has no phone. He spoke to another neighbour who also has no phone but advised him to speak to the police.

He waited for the police to come, then they said they would write to him. He visited Southall police station five or six times, to ask about the outcome of the complaint he had made, but heard nothing from them. He had experienced five subsequent assaults by the woman. He has written it all in a diary sheet, and been in touch with a solicitor.

Walking round the estate later that afternoon, one of the committee members identified the woman. Later he told us that the incident was sorted.

In this unremarkable corner of London we can hear several languages spoken, the diversity not echoed in the architecture or the spaces. It's as if there were no common narrative about being on Havelock and little common language. Words like urgent/problem/need/help may need something extra in translation.

Much of the bias of policy, media and funding serves to strengthen ties based on common interests, arguably to the detriment of diverse connections among local people. The importance of neighbourhood relations has been neglected, in a neglected public realm. When people have few other choices for their social connections, the poverty of neighbourhood ties becomes critical. It will take time to restore the balance. Mrs V stresses the approach in the residents' organisation to inclusive development based on patience and commitment:
"You don't plant a garden and expect it to be beautiful straight away."

Another resident told us that people are afraid to go to the post office to collect their pension or benefit because they know they can lose it straight away to a mugger as they turn the corner. People want surveillance cameras, in this kind of environment.

Here the level of informal connections between residents begins to seem critically low. Mr S was telling me he has lived on the estate now for 30 years. The other day he was in the local store doing the lottery and got into conversation with a woman about having a win on the horses at Cheltenham. She remarked that she'd lived on Havelock for 20 years and they'd never spoken before. He pointed out that he's spoken often to her daughter.

> *"When people form and maintain informal alliances with their neighbors – when they visit and talk to each other and help each other out – they can buffer the negative effects of living in a dangerous neighbourhood."*
> *(Ross and Jang 2000, p412)*

Mr S says that 20 years ago, everyone hung out together in the field of an evening, even when the weather was poor. He speaks simply about those days, apparently without passionate regret. Now his kids hardly ever play out.

'Neighbour clout' is one resident's way of describing the kind of respect that he feels is appropriate for dealing with challenging behaviour... A neighbour with clout can get people to do things and to listen to what they say, and it will affect what they do."
(Harris and Gale 2004, p27)

"The regular residents of ordinary urban neighbourhoods get to know each other by sight. They meet shopping, standing at the bus stop or walking in the street, and over time they learn the public habits and timetables of people they do not know by name and probably never visit where they live. Recognizing and being recognized by others create a sense of belonging…"
(Wallman 1998 p184)

It's hard to sustain informal connections without mini-catalysts. These might be people such as religious leaders, community workers or youth workers, mums and dads who

know the kids and what they're up to, and who have some 'clout.' Or they might be places such as a community café or some kind of club; or occasions such as a school fair or a football match. In practice, the strengths that underpin integrated neighbourhoods tend to come in some combination of these things. How do we catalyse the catalysts?

Housing, play and drugs

We trudge up the rough concrete stairway and Rina, holding the youngest, shows us into her home. We're on the second floor, looking out over some junk-stuffed yards and the next block a few metres beyond. Two rooms, a kitchen, a bathroom. Her partner's there, holding the toddler. He shows us where the damp accumulates around the windows. You can see how the moisture builds up and the heating becomes almost pointless. The low ceilings mean even less air is circulating. Alright, *you* try keeping the walls dry and clean in winter. The kids are unwell, the whole time. Here's where the mice run. Here's where we have to put the rubbish.

As you leave you realise there really isn't any agreeable semi-private or semi-public space, there are no places where, if you bump into a neighbour, you'd be tempted to linger for a chat. It's almost as if neighbourliness were designed-out from the start.

We met one woman who has two children, both with asthma and eczema. She herself has mobility problems and needs to live on the ground floor with no stairs. She told us that she had been trying for six years to get re-housed from her one-bed first-floor flat, but has now simply given up. Mr and Mrs P were without heating for four weeks in the winter. To an outsider, the absence of housing services from the estate is puzzling. It contributes to the resigned sense of abandonment by the authorities.[2]

When we ran our first open day at the community shop, the most striking testimony came from a very articulate lad of around 11 or 12 years old, who offered a relentless catalogue of the decay, disorder, prostitution and drug-related debris around his house without once thinking it necessary to spell out the implied constraints on what should be his natural play area. He seldom played out.

Ghate and Hazel (2001) in their study of parenting in low-income neighbourhoods, record one lone parent's account of a comparable situation:

"There would be prostitutes on the corner, and there would be people fighting after dark, and they were employing children on BMXs to run crack from the dealers to the buyers and back again. So we were worried about children getting caught up in people fighting over drugs [if they played outside]. It just meant, stay indoors. Most of my friends don't let their children out to play at all." (p91)

The researchers observed how this environmental effect took hold.

"The impact on families of environmental hazards was often to make parents anxious about children's health and safety. This tended to mean that children's freedom of movement was restricted, and that parents had to take special measures to circumvent these problems." (p89)

We can contrast this with the experience of growing up in a 1920s Edinburgh tenement:

"You were never in anyway. When you say you lived in a room-and-kitchen, your mum and dad lived in a room-and-kitchen, but you played out in the street, summer and winter, you didn't come in till bedtime."
(Clark and Carnegie 2003, p38).

Eighty years later on the Havelock estate, as one resident put it, "You can't even leave your washing out because it gets nicked." There was play equipment here originally, in the space between these back yards, but the space was colonised by drug users and the kit was removed. No-one knows why nothing replaced it. The question induces a shrug. It's just tarmac and gravel, the weeds lack commitment.

"The effect of drug dealing in, say, a block of flats can be dire – constant comings and goings at all hours, discarded needles in common parts, threats from dealers, violence from turf wars and to enforce debts, and so on. Often the dealers are not tenants, but have moved in and control a flat..." (Burney 2005, p77)

Further on there are the covered garages, a gloomy and dirty underpass where you wouldn't want to linger. A group of asylum seekers lived in one of the boarded garages here for some months. Other garages are bricked up with breeze blocks.

Local knowledge and the availability of information
What is 'local knowledge'? We tend to use the term when we want to claim that residents know things that are not readily apparent to the outsider. You might have all the worldly knowledge you can cram into your system, but without local knowledge, in some places you will struggle, you will need others.

Local people who know their patch will tend to have an intimate knowledge of their home topography, its advantages and disadvantages, perhaps key people to keep in with or to avoid, where they can get hold of certain goods or services, how to get out of a tricky situation. The classic local knowledge for kids is a gap in the fence. For householders it might be knowing who is a competent plumber, or who could lend you a few quid till Friday, or that so-and-so's oldest is a reliable baby-sitter.

The Center for the Study of Local Knowledge at the University of Virginia offers this definition of local knowledge:
"a community's shared understanding of its cultural, economic, political, and social relations, across space and time, and the implications for the everyday ordering and reordering of society."[3]

The contribution of local knowledge to the reordering of everyday life is important, but otherwise this is a narrow definition, focusing as it does just on relations. What we need to add is that local knowledge has little currency beyond. You can seldom take your local knowledge of your neighbourhood and hope to 'spend' much of it elsewhere; it's unlikely to be recognised. What this implies is that there needs to be a fluid economy of knowledge at the local level, just as there has to be at other levels.

"Some of the knowledge will be mythic or reinforce views: some will be deferential to those who appear to be of importance or have power. Some will be about people

and events (anecdote and experience), and other about property, rules, planning (professional or interest related etc). Some will atrophy perhaps, but other bits flourish." (Dudley 2006)

We might also be asking, to what extent are outsiders interested in the local knowledge of Havelock: are others interested in the people, the property, the activities here? What opportunities do residents have to talk to outsiders about their territory?

In research into the practice of 'storytelling neighbourhood' in Los Angeles neighbourhoods, Ball-Rokeach and her colleagues suggest that residents' abilities to articulate belonging is associated with the presence of home owners, long-term residents, community organisations, local media that 'storytell' the neighbourhood, and interactions between neighbours. (Ball-Rokeach et al 2001). On most if not all of these factors, Havelock would score low.

What happens when local people retreat indoors, lose alertness to the minute and subtle changes in their neighbourhood, and after a while cannot be said to know their own patch? What happens then to local knowledge? Some Havelock residents appear to sense that crisis, they sense that their knowledge decreases in value as it becomes less recognised:

"Feels like a maze." (Mapping exercise)

"People are living in isolation." (Resident comment)

It may be that local knowledge can atrophy if its currency is not circulating sufficiently. If too few people are actively sharing information that is locally-pertinent, what is being shared will itself lose value.

Where do local narratives get rehearsed, where do stories get told? In most neighbourhoods, it's in the pub, at the school gates, walking the dog, in the post office queue, among the hooded kids on the street corner. Stories of masculine recklessness, tales of confrontation with authorities, advice on babies, that yarn about her at no. 63, gossip about him and her, accounts of wretched luck or news of those who've moved away. In a healthy local information ecology, such processes will flow naturally and largely unnoticed.

It becomes apparent that Havelock lacks 'occasions,' the causes and opportunities for interactions, serendipitous encounters, the sparks of sociability, the quick word and wave of greeting that are the raw material of commonality, the sense of place and safety. Stories go untold, there is no reverberation of myth, and neighbourhood life is unassured.

Campbell and Jovchelovitch (2000) add more depth to what they call local knowledges:

"They are not only lay knowledge 'about something'; they are also expressive of how communities hand down, sustain and negotiate their cultural identities, ways of life and strategies for survival and living." (p265).

According to Campbell and Jovchelovitch, local knowledges "are organically linked to the *cultural traditions*, the *social identities* and the *material conditions* of living of a community."[4]

So what happens where cultural traditions are varied and are not overtly and collectively celebrated; where the identities are fractured; and the material conditions are poor?

A woman came in and asked what she should do about her sons. She said they don't do much except sit in and watch telly, then they start to get angry and violent, she worries that they will get into trouble. She was aware that they may be using drugs, and it seems they bully her for money. I helped her use the internet to find a telephone number to call for advice; hopefully she went away and used it. I asked her how old the boys are. One is 28, the other 25.

This took place during an open day, where the theme was supposed to be about accessing and using new technologies. Seeing the community shop open and occupied by a non-threatening group she felt confident enough to bring her personal problem in – not a curiosity about technologies – and share it with someone else. This points to the importance of having at least one place on the estate where people can go with the possibility of addressing personal but community-related issues.

Formal information plays only occasional minor roles in this neighbourhood. There is a community noticeboard with out-of-date posters and a street map decorated with mild graffiti.

"Residents don't need signs, only foreigners do… In this sense, all signs are of not belonging, of coming from somewhere else." (Carter 2002, p11)

Staff at the Family Centre have recognised the importance of a flow of information and are producing a newsletter. The residents' organisation also produces occasional newsletters and people spend time delivering leaflets around the estate. Volunteers at the community shop field enquiries as consistently as they can. A mobile library calls at the nearest community centre, just beyond the boundary of the estate, for half an hour each Friday lunchtime. This was not mentioned at any time by any of the residents we spoke to.

In 2004 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister published a report which looked at some case studies of the involvement of black and minority ethnic housing associations in stock transfer processes. (ODPM 2004) The section describing the experience on Havelock highlights poor communication and lack of information in the period of the first stock transfer ballot. Residents continue to feel that information that is of importance is not shared with them, they have little idea of when key decisions about regeneration are being taken nor how.

They talk, some with contempt and others in a hesitant and puzzled way, about the fact that they cannot register more than one repair request at a time, when phoning their landlord. Residents have to hang up, re-dial, and re-join the queue if they have more than one problem in their flat – or if they try to call on behalf of a neighbour as well as themselves.

This suggests a blunt lack of respect for ordinary citizens, but not the sort that makes the headlines. It is not the kind of experience that features on the government's Respect agenda, but it is fair to say that it characterises the routine experience of local people on Havelock, in their relations with the landlord and with authorities. Residents feel disempowered and they are subject to systematic and legitimised disrespect, but it goes unregistered.

At the personal and household level, residents have the opportunity to use an award-winning housing service called Locata[5], which provides a telephone, text-messaging and online bidding system for homes that become available. It's often referred to by the residents but we have heard no instance of positive feedback or successful use of the system. These are often people quite desperate to move into accommodation more suitable and less unhealthy for their families, they are prepared to put time and effort into the exercise; but they find that information about available properties reaches them too late to be of use. The model seems to make sense as a way of helping people in several adjacent London boroughs to relocate, and to make best use of available homes. But it seems not to be working on a personal level in this locality.

Community participation and regeneration

When government departments write about 'communities' they must mean places like this. Havelock is geographically defined. It has over 800 units – large enough for things to be happening in the community sector but small enough, apparently, to have dropped off the radar of some service providers.

Government press releases and other documents celebrate communities of residents at this kind of scale, where change has been brought about and the quality of life has been improved. One assumption is that there is something sufficiently cohesive that can be defined as a 'community.' And one question is how often the achievements worthy of celebration are brought about in spite of, rather than because of, official involvement.

Taylor (2000) notes the need for various kinds of resources to be available at local level if the government's ambitions for community involvement in regeneration are to be realised:

> *"Community participants need resources for the kind of information and officer support that other partners are more able to take for granted and for facilities to make participation easier, like child care." (p1026)*

Taylor also sets out some issues associated with national community regeneration programmes such as New Deal for Communities. She notes that their guidelines ensure that local developments can be understood within an overarching national policy framework. But there is a catch:

> *"Coming from the centre, as they do, they enshrine pre-existing cultures of programme design and decision-making, rather than taking the risk that communities, given time and resources, may do things differently." (p1024)*
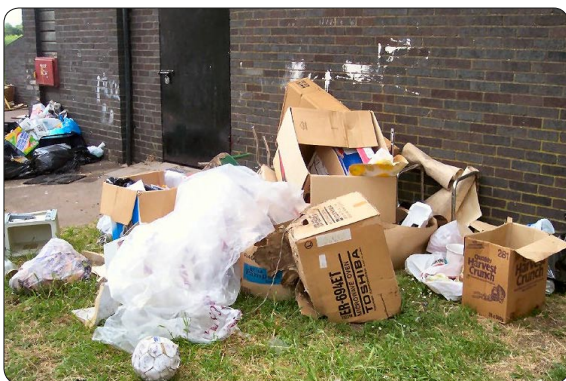
This raises a question with regard to Havelock: how can it perform as the government exhorts communities to perform, when there is a glaring lack of involvement on the part of services, a delay on investment in regeneration, and an undeveloped community sector?

> *"A certain sheer density of community activity – of people knowing each other, acting together, extending their awareness of what's going on around them - is essential before one can speak meaningfully of 'involving the community' in a higher forum." (Chanan 2000)*

On Havelock there is still a little anger to build on. A small group of residents' committee members continue to go to service group meetings and tenant management training and to work towards the physical regeneration of the estate. They know they are in for a long haul and that their numbers will fluctuate. But the situation at present makes the government's notions of neighbourhood governance (ODPM 2005) look formidably ambitious. The 'responsibilisation' of local people is likely to be seen at best as distasteful when official agencies are seen as failing to fulfil their basic obligations. (Herbert 2005) Discussing the absence of housing services, one officer told us: "They took all the good people off the estates."

"Urban public life is challenged by the growth of cities… A variety of middle- and working-class groups are able to go about their urban lives in an almost complete lack of urbane contact with and awareness of each other." (Calhoun 1998, p388)

"Community strength and local involvement, though powerful bases for mobilization, do not constitute adequate bases for democracy. Democracy must depend also on the kind of public life which historically has flourished in cities, not as the direct extension of communal bonds, but as the outgrowth of social practices which continually brought different sorts of people into contact with each other and which gave them adequate bases for understanding each other and managing boundary-crossing relations."
(Calhoun 1998, p391)

Remarks are made about a lack of openness and of divisions in the work of the residents' organisation. But there are also counter-claims about the council being "manipulative - it allowed the residents' organisation to exist as a gesture of consultation without delivery or power." Whatever the history, it's clear that the low level of participation is problematic in a context where people fear the swelling wave of the drug culture, recognise the lack of informal connections, and lack everyday occasions for interaction. It is in no-one's interest for things to stay as they are, except those perniciously poised to exploit disorder.
"Neighborhood disorder undermines the very thing needed to cope with its harmful effects because it also generates a sense of powerlessness among residents." (Ross et al 2001, p584)

Local people need the chance to participate in some empowering evidence-collection and recording about the conditions in which they live. They need opportunities for collective endeavour, and some recognition for their efforts in compensating for service inadequacies.

Two urban worlds
What then can we say about this as an urban context? How can this slightly dull and threadbare urban tapestry be compared with the capsular experience of consumption, of retail as theatre - the spectacle packaged in this season's colours, sampled in mobile-summoned company with a shared cappuccino - which can be found a few miles away in Paddington? None of its ingredients is here. If any characters appear in both scenes, it is likely they will be Havelock residents as service workers around the station area. There is after all no "single citizenship of consumption." (Sorkin 1992, pxiii)

Those who protest at the clinical predictability of urban consumer honey-pots tend to focus on what's missing that somehow represents urban life. If the shopping centres are derided as antiseptic, in what way might Havelock be preferable? Rowan Moore for instance notes the way the malls are purged of "danger, instability and multiplicity." (Moore 1999, p19) Ask these writers round, see what they think. This is Havelock: is there enough infestation and instability and danger here, does it qualify? Is there some common vocabulary for these two forms of urban existence? What are the values that will give shared meaning to these two uses of the word 'urban'?

Residents want their estate to be more permeable, more connected to the wider society. They are aware that they have not been given the level of service they are due. And they sense the implications of a weakening community presence under the glowering drugs threat. There are cultures masked here and stifled, there are ways of life and understanding that could have enormous social value if expressed. There is too little celebration of lives previously lived full of colour, or young potential yet to discover itself. Without occasions to meet and see people, without conversations, without people passing through, Havelock is vulnerable to decay. The estate lacks a public life, and in this civic silence, people need to hear themselves speak.

Notes

1. Since this interview, we understand that planning permission has now been granted for a quality multi-sports facility with a broad constituency across the borough, and this is welcomed by the residents' committee.
2. The landlord is an 'arm's length management organisation' (ALMO) entirely owned by the council.
3. http://www.virginia.edu/cslk/mission.html
4. Emphasis added
5. http://www.locata.org/

Appendix 1

Activities

The following events and activities were carried out between July 2005 and April 2006 on the Havelock estate.

- Committee meetings of Havelock Independent Residents' Organisation (HIRO) (ongoing)
- Tenant management training (ongoing, see Appendix 2)
- Play space consultation - In March 2006, Groundwork West London carried out consultation on behalf of Havelock Independent Residents Organisation (HIRO), on planning new play facilities on the estate.
- HIRO general meeting (very few non-committee residents attended) October 2005
- General open day with Proboscis, using map (about 60 residents dropped-in during the course of the afternoon and evening) October 2005
- Local Level workshop on neighbourhood governance, at Westbourne, west London (several committee members participated) November 2005
- HIRO featured in an article published in New Start magazine, 18 November 2005.
- Devonport visit (four committee members took part in a day trip to visit the Pembroke Street estate in Devonport, and to discuss estate-based management practice) January 2006
- ICT open day with online access and computer bus parked outside (about 30 residents dropped-in during the course of the afternoon and evening) March 2006
- Treasury visit (three government officials came for informal discussions at the Family Centre and a walkabout followed by further discussions at the community shop) April 2006
- Big Lottery application (an unsuccessful application was made for funding to support information and communication work in the community shop) April 2006.

Appendix 2

Tenant management – the headlines

- HIRO is pursuing Tenant Management for the Havelock estate and is in the 'feasibility stage'.
- A ballot was carried out in June 2005. A large majority voted in favour to explore tenant management further.
- A Right to Manage Notice was served on the council in August 2005.
- Full support given by the council and Ealing Homes.
- Independent advice and training from Partners in Change for feasibility study.

Appendix 3

Demographics	
White	17.6%
Mixed	1.6%
Asian or Asian British; Indian	51.1%
Asian or Asian British; Pakistani	10.3%
Asian or Asian British; Bangladeshi	0.6%
Other Asian	6.9%
Black or Black British; caribbean	2.6%
Black or Black British; african	4.9%
Chinese or other ethnic group	4.2%
Household composition: key statistics	
Pensioner households	6%
Families with dependent children	44%
Lone parent families	7%
Single person households below pensionable age	11%

Source: 2001 Census LSOA data for Ealing 029E

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This is a personal essay about a housing estate in west London, based on observations and discussions with residents. All the views and reflections are the author's and do not necessarily represent the views of any organisation nor of the publisher. Names in the text have been changed.

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Social Tapestries

A research programme exploring the potential benefits and costs of local knowledge mapping and sharing (public authoring). Since 2004 Proboscis has developed a series of experimental uses of public authoring with local communities to demonstrate the social and cultural benefits of local knowledge sharing enabled by mobile and network technologies. These playful and challenging experiments build upon the Urban Tapestries framework and software platform developed by Proboscis and its partners.
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