Connected Communities

Resilient, mutual self-help in cities of growing diversity

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Executive Summary
In cities of growing diversity a complex and dynamic set of variables have led to new patterns of settlement and community dynamics that pose challenges to civic engagement and call into the question the feasibility of models of participation based on representation. Mutual self-help models based on membership offer a different lens to understand participation. Whilst self-help activities clearly promote active citizenship and sit well with the Coalition Government’s ‘Big Society’ agenda, with its emphasis on volunteering, they pose questions in terms of their role and ability to enhance community resilience and mitigate against some of the risks associated with the co-existence of groups from different vantage points. To date the ‘Big Society’ agenda has tended to present an unproblematic account of participation and empowerment of communities and fails to give consideration to existing inequalities of power, economic, social and cultural capitals which can mediate and determine levels of self help activities as well as wider civic engagement. It is important to think about the starting points of different communities and ways to engage disempowered and under the radar groups if the ‘Big Society’ is to move from concept to reality without further marginalising disenfranchised members of society which could only serve to undermine rather than strengthen community resilience.

Key words
Community resilience, super diversity, participation, mutualism self-help.
**Rationale and context**

This paper aims to stimulate debate in relation to thinking around resilience, mutual self-help and participation, both formal and informal, in an era of 'super-diversity' in order to enhance our knowledge about the realities of these activities and to assist in the development of current government policy around localism, successful community participation and the 'Big Society'. Issues of social and community capital, empowerment and participation are considered in the context of growing diversity and the implications this has for community resilience within the current socio-economic and political environment. Whilst many of these issues have been explored individually in an array of disciplinary areas, they have not been the subject of connected consideration.

Evidence from previous reviews on participation in place-making activities has underpinned an inclusive model of community engagement and reiterated the need for representation. Whilst this may be important in statutory services, our review and workshop findings reflect on whether a different approach is more helpful in considering how mutual self-help can be fostered in increasingly diverse urban areas, and in so doing enhance community resilience.

**The resilience turn in urban policy and practice**

Resilience, the capacity to withstand and rebound from disruptive challenges, is a concept incorporating a vast range of contemporary risks and 'a response to existential or material vulnerability, insecurity and, ultimately, change'. Moreover, 'resilience is most effective when it involves a mutual and accountable network of civic institutions, agencies and individual citizens working in partnership towards common goals within a common strategy'. In recent times the idea of resilience has begun to infiltrate a host of social and economic policies associated with environmental and economic crises and, more broadly with the desire to construct more resilient and connected communities within the 'Big Society' agenda.

**The genesis of UK resilience policy**

The term 'resilience' came to the fore to represent institutional changes enacted through the 2004 Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) which aimed to establish 'a modern framework for civil protection capable of meeting the challenges of the 21st century'. Through the CCA, the UK government attempted to provide a central strategic direction for developing resilience. Built around several key activities it is focused on identifying the risks of disruptive challenge, and planning for the future:

"Anticipation of risk allows choices to be made. In some circumstances, it is possible to prevent disruptive challenges occurring by taking action at an early stage. In other cases, planning has to take place to prepare to deal with a disruptive challenge. If the
disruption does occur it becomes necessary to respond, and once the situation is brought under control the focus becomes recovery. This cycle – anticipation, prevention, preparation, response and recovery – is at the heart of resilience.\textsuperscript{xiii}

Over time emerging lessons from security and emergency planning policy discourse have combined with contemporary policy drivers connected to austerity and enhanced localism, highlighting the shift in the nucleus of policy from nationally-driven securitisation towards local integrated place-based outcomes where community/social resilience is seen as key and where the ‘adaptive capacity’ of social systems is enhanced\textsuperscript{xiv}. In this sense social or community resilience is seen very much as the participation of citizens in the process of making the state more resilient and to help manage threats and ‘conditions of uncertainty’. Such a focus on shared action requires a response based on the principles of subsidiarity. As traditionally understood UK resilience is based on a command and control approach from central government. Increasingly, however, the focus of resilience policy is being directed toward smaller spatial scales and everyday activities\textsuperscript{xv} which ‘is premised on institutions and organisations letting go, [and] creating the necessary framework for action’\textsuperscript{xvi}.

\textit{The ’Big Society’ and community resilience}

Resilience approaches are now central to ongoing policy responses which aim to deliver ‘more for less’ with many of the resilience principles developed in other policy circles being embedded within the current drive towards enhanced localism\textsuperscript{xvii}. Such localised resilience approaches are increasingly centred not upon state institutions, but upon networked responses, with governance distributed more widely across key stakeholders and sectors. As a leading UK policy think tank noted:

“A model of ‘resilience’, both at the community and individual levels, will potentially help decisions in policy making and local resource prioritisation and enable authorities to develop a better adaptive capacity to adverse events.”\textsuperscript{xviii}

In this context it is the social consequences or ‘the ability of communities to withstand external shocks to their social infrastructure’ that is of greatest significance and concern\textsuperscript{xix}. The focus here is upon creating resilient communities that will ‘have the skills, energy, resources and ambition to do better for… citizens...(and for)...local people and groups to take control of their communities, to determine what happens and how to build strong, healthy and vibrant areas where people are proud to live.”\textsuperscript{xix} Although local institutional and adaptive capacity is expected to drive the move towards enhancing community resilience, this is also overseen by newly emerging national frameworks where community resilience is seen through the lens of emergency planning: ‘communities and individuals harnessing local resources and expertise to help themselves in an emergency, in a way that complements the response of the emergency services’\textsuperscript{xxi}. Such ideas are also in line with the principles of place-based resilience as promoted under the Coalition government’s localism and decentralisation plans where
‘Big Society’ aims to ‘reduce the barriers which prevent people from being able to help themselves and to become more resilient to shocks’. xxii

Emerging in the UK predominantly as a policy connected to countering the threat of international terrorism, resilience is now being fully embedded as a policy metaphor for envisioning future localism with resilience practices increasingly being adopted by local policy makers as part of their modus operandi.

**Mutualism**

The benefits that mutual, self-help can deliver underpin the philosophy of the ‘Big Society’xxiii. Mutualism is a philosophy where rights and responsibilities, personal liberty and social equity are balancedxxiv, which in practice is a means of organising resources through the sharing of costs and benefits. It is underpinned by the principles of co-operationxxv and co-production, the active engagement and collaboration between producers, users and consumers (not mutually exclusive) to aid development and innovationxxvi delivering effective and efficient production and delivery of products and servicesxxvii. Both formalxxviii and informalxxix forms of mutual organisation have delivered a long history of success. When they are well run, when they serve the appropriate markets and when they are organised on the right scale, they have significant advantages over organisations with which they competexxx.

Whilst contributing to the overall aims of the ‘Big Society’, the State should not take the benefits of mutual organisations and enterprises for granted, nor should it crowd out or stifle development through top-down measuresxxxii. They have always developed organically, from the bottom-up and have usually been focused around a common problem or concern which has been inappropriately addressed or ignored by other providers. The origins of the co-operative movement are testimony to thisxxxii. Importantly they have embodied the principle of open, democratic, active membership, an important distinction and deviation from the representative and all-inclusive model of community commonly favoured by policy makers. Here ‘community’ is a problematic term because of its indiscriminate and empty usexxxiii. Those who opt in to these ventures are members, and membership provides a useful lens for considering participation in projects which have community benefit. It is a demonstration of active citizenshipxxxiv where recognition can be given to the range of transactions between different types of membersxxxv.

Furthermore, the benefits of mutualism are largely derived through enterprise, albeit where the economic purpose is motivated by the social benefits delivered, i.e. a social enterprisexxxvi. This further emphasises how these ventures are not all-inclusive forms of community, but organisations run as businesses for the benefit of the community and as such participation has to be managed, as in any stakeholder-owned businessxxxvii. And as a business it is critical to consider where the incoming resources come from as much as the benefit which can be derived for the wider community.
Taking both of these elements into account might enable mutual organisations to overcome the financial hurdles some currently face by clearly acknowledging the role, the costs and the benefits to all stakeholders and providing them with the appropriate and equitable level of control in its running. Mutuals are projects run by self-selecting groups from which the wider community derives benefits, initially through engagement as members though later as the recipients of services and investment in other enterprises\textsuperscript{xxxviii}.

**Super-diversity and self-help**

The UK, like much of Europe, has now entered an era of 'super-diversity'\textsuperscript{xxxix}, a term which surpasses the way in which diversity is traditionally conceptualised by offering a multidimensional perspective that moves beyond 'the ethnic group as either the unit of analysis or sole object of study'\textsuperscript{x} to recognising a complex and dynamic interplay of factors that shape people's lives. In addition to age, gender, (dis)ability and ethnicity differentials, super-diverse communities comprise of individuals from multiple origins who are transnationally connected, socio-economically and legally stratified\textsuperscript{xli}. Super-diversity is central to debates about integration and segregation\textsuperscript{xlii}. The added complexity brought about by the demographic, social and cultural changes resulting from flows of immigration since the early 1990s also pose a range of challenges for active citizenship and the overall levels community resilience. Furthermore, understanding the way in which these added dimensions to communities coalesce to influence the way in which individuals connect within and across communities as well as wider society and civic structures, including mutual organisations, have yet to be fully realised. Whilst the mutual, self-help movement is developing within new migrant communities there is evidence to suggest that it tends to be limited in scope and ability to promote certain types of engagement integral to community integration and resilience\textsuperscript{xliii}.

With the advent of super-diversity we have seen an increase in the emergence of Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs), largely as a response to gaps in mainstream service and welfare provision for newcomers. The RCO movement provides a useful example that illustrates the nature of self-help activities occurring within new communities. RCOs are typically made up of self selected members often on the basis of faith or ethnicity\textsuperscript{xliiv}. Whilst the single group approach to community organising has been criticised for reinforcing difference and cultural separatism\textsuperscript{xlv}, RCOs have played an important self help role, which has been integral to the integration of newcomers\textsuperscript{xlvi}. Gameledin- Adhami \textit{et al.} (2002)\textsuperscript{xlvii} provide a typology of RCOs highlighting their contribution in helping newcomers with the settlement process, which includes the provision of cultural and emotional support as well as access to housing and employment through the development of social networks; practical assistance in the form of orientation to the host system, translation and mediation; and the potential for members to attain knowledge to inform policy development.
The type of networks and social capital formed by RCOs has received considerable attention including recognition of some of the negative effects, such as the problem of closed networks with strong ties which may exclude outsiders from the accumulation of capital. Furthermore, recent research demonstrates that the type of mutualism offered by RCOs promotes certain types of social capital. The type of networks that newcomers have access to through their membership of RCOs most commonly facilitates the acquisition of 'bonding' capital, through informal networks comprising of members from their own ethnic group or in some cases ‘bridging’ capital offered through faith based networks, which facilitates interaction with individuals outside of their own ethnic group. Whilst ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ ties, particularly important in building neighbourhood trust were present, there is little evidence to suggest that newcomers are at a stage or in a position where they might benefit from 'linking' capital, which would enable them to develop connections between those with different levels of power and/or social status. However, the possession of social capital can lead to other forms of capital such as financial and economic capital. RCO membership not only enables individuals to build friendships and gain access to advice and guidance but is also instrumental in gaining access to other resources such as employment and housing. RCOs clearly play a valuable function in enabling individuals to become active within their own communities but their function is limited in terms of connecting individuals across communities and the extent to which they can help newcomers engage in mainstream/formal activities.

Policy Implications and recommendations for future research

The evolving and ever changing nature of super-diverse communities clearly poses challenges to policy makers seeking to mobilise the 'Big Society' from concept to reality. Evidence on the impact of diversity on civic engagement remains limited and further exploration is needed to understand the implications for community resilience as well as other indicators that may impact on the relationship.

Research on self-help activities within refugee communities found little evidence of groups becoming more engaged and more socially and politically active within the mainstream. RCOs provide an example of self-help within new communities which involves individuals coming together to gain help, support and friendship. These organisations are member based and have a remit of activities often set in accordance to the direct needs of their members. RCOs do however face significant challenges in term of securing acceptance and recognition by the mainstream, which can pose a threat to their sustainability.

Whilst mutual self-help models of participation, based on active membership rather than representation, can help communities connect, questions remain regarding the extent to which they can help promote multi-group relations or indeed encourage the participation of communities with low levels of civic engagement, issues of central concern to attempts to enhance community resilience. It is recognised that refugee groups represent only a partial picture of super-diversity and further work is needed to fully
understand the nature and patterns or self-help within other newcomer communities and indeed wider society. It should however be noted that new communities often come from cultures where self-help is considered the norm and as such may be able to offer new ways or interesting insights into ‘what works’.

Future research on participation in populations of growing diversity must account for the conjunction of ethnicity alongside a range of additional variables that will undoubtedly play a role in the way in which individuals from different vantage points connect with one another, interact and engage in wider society and civic structures. It is important to recognise that communities evolve and adapt at different paces\textsuperscript{lvii}. New communities with issues around integration and histories of isolation may, for example, find it more challenging to participate at the same rate as other more engaged communities. Forms of participation capable of encouraging the integration of communities with low levels of engagement are essential in enhancing community connectivity as well as avoiding some of the dangers concerning the reproduction of social divisions and inequalities levelled at the ‘Big Society’\textsuperscript{lvii} that could serve to undermine community resilience.

**Concluding statement**

Rising unemployment, budget cuts and competition for scarce resources will inevitably create tension and place added pressure on community relations. Developing a model of community resilience that works well in different contexts requires an understanding of the starting point that different communities are at on their path to becoming part of the ‘Big Society’. Mutuals offer an important role in enabling people to bond with others from within their community of interest, but offer less of an enabling function in the process of connecting individuals with wider communities, civic and political structures. Models of mutual self help have a pivotal role in helping to build the Coalition Government’s notion of the ‘Big Society’ but questions concerning their ability to strengthen community resilience remain unresolved. Likewise it remains to be seen whether communities will become more resilient as they diversify and become more accustomed to dealing with the social pressures associated with change. Forms of participation that can promote resilience based on collective coping strategies that enable authorities to develop better adaptive capacity to deal with adverse events are likely to become increasingly important as populations become more diverse.

**APPENDIX 1**

**Workshop facilitators:**

Dr P. A. Jones, Researcher

Jayne Thornhill, Researcher
**Participating organisations:**

Ashiana Community Project, Sparkbrook, Birmingham
Birmingham and Black Country Community Foundation, Nechells, Birmingham
Birmingham Justice and Advocacy Centre, Birmingham
Internet Radio, Birmingham
Bromsgrove Indian Community Forum, Worcestershire
Community Activisit, Bournville, Birmingham
Community Investment, One Housing Group
Edgbaston Arts Forum, Birmingham
Gateway Family Services, CIC
Hindu Forum of Walsall, West Midlands
Ideal for All, Sandwell
New Leaf Family Services, Birmingham
Our Place, Kings Norton, Birmingham
Somali Parental Agency, Birmingham
StridingOut CIC, Birmingham
The Jan Foundation, Birmingham
We Can Do, Harborne, Birmingham
Wychall Family and Children’s Centre, Northfield, Birmingham

**APPENDIX 2**

**The guiding governance principles of UK Resilience**

**Preparedness** - All those individuals and organisations that might have to respond to emergencies should be properly prepared, including having clarity of roles and responsibilities.

**Continuity** - Response to emergencies should be grounded in the existing functions of organisations and familiar ways of working, albeit delivered at a greater tempo, on a larger scale and in more testing circumstances.

**Subsidiarity** - Decisions should be taken at the lowest appropriate level, with co-ordination at the highest necessary level. Local responders should be the building block of response on any scale.
Direction - Clarity of purpose should be delivered through a strategic aim and supporting objectives that are agreed and understood by all involved to prioritise and focus the response.

Integration - Effective co-ordination should be exercised between and within organisations and tiers of response as well as timely access to appropriate guidance and appropriate support for the local or regional level.

Communication - Good two-way communication is critical to an effective response. Reliable information must be passed correctly and without delay between those who need to know, including the public.

Co-operation - Positive engagement based on mutual trust and understanding will facilitate information sharing and deliver effective solutions to issues arising.

Anticipation - Risk identification and analysis is needed of potential direct and indirect developments to anticipate and thus manage the consequences.


Endnotes


5 See Appendix 1 for a list of workshop participants and researchers who assisted the project team in facilitating the workshop, “Together, can we do it?” 28th June 2011, University of Birmingham.

6 Resilience, from the Latin resilire: ‘to leap back’, is a metaphor that has been discussed at length in the academic literature with various disciplines and sub-disciplines laying claim to its etymological evolution and applying it within different experimental, and largely theoretical, contexts. Work by ecologists, psychologists,

7 Coaffee, J. et al. (2008), op.cit., p.3
8 Ibid.
10 This Act came into force in November 2005. See also UK Resilience website within the Cabinet Office - http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/ukresilience - which pre-dated the CCA. Prior to 2000 resilience was a term seldom heard within urban policy circles. Subsequent crisis in 2000/2001 linked to strategically targeted nationwide protests on the transport network (blockades of oil refineries, go-slow convoys on motorways), an outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease and a number of serious flooding incidents highlighted a series of endemic organisational response failings regarding the price of fuel, led to significant impacts on the national economy. Recent rounds of privatisation, reorganisation and a general hollowing-out of the state had left a disorganised ‘chain of command’ without authoritative leadership, indicating that a reform of emergency planning procedures was long overdue. See Coaffee, J. (2006) From counter-terrorism to resilience: European Legacy, *Journal of the International Society for the study of European Ideas (ISSEI)* 11(4): 389-403. The subsequent events of 9/11, and the concern that key sites in and around UK cities would be terrorist targets, accelerated this process and made reform of emergency preparedness a key political priority.
13 This was based on a set of core principles outlined in Appendix 2 (from Cabinet Office, 2003, op.cit.).
15 Coaffee, J. et al. (2008), op cit.
17 See for example, HM Government (2010) *Decentralisation and the Localism Bill: an essential guide*, London: TSO. ‘Big Society’ is defined by the Cabinet Office (2011a) Big Society at http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/big-society as ‘about helping people to come together to improve their own lives. It’s about putting more power in people’s hands, a massive transfer of power from Whitehall to local communities’.
22 Ibid. pp.3-4.


The accepted definition by the UK Government is outlined in *Scaling New Heights: Social Enterprise Action Plan* (Office for the Third Sector, 2006) and builds on a more rounded definition proposed by Spreckley, F. (1981) *Social Audit: A Management Tool for Co-operative Working*, Local Livelihoods http://www.locallivelihoods.com/Documents/Social%20Audit%201981.pdf: "An enterprise that is owned by those who work in it and/or reside in a given locality, is governed by registered social as well as commercial aims and objectives and run co-operatively may be termed a social enterprise. Traditionally, ‘capital hires labour’ with the overriding emphasis on making a ‘profit’ over and above any benefit either to the business itself or the workforce. Contrasted to this is the social enterprise where ‘labour hires capital’ with the emphasis on social, environmental and financial benefit”.


57 Coote, A. (2011) op.cit.
The Connected Communities

Connected Communities is a cross-Council Programme being led by the AHRC in partnership with the EPSRC, ESRC, MRC and NERC and a range of external partners. The current vision for the Programme is:

“to mobilise the potential for increasingly inter-connected, culturally diverse, communities to enhance participation, prosperity, sustainability, health & well-being by better connecting research, stakeholders and communities.”

Further details about the Programme can be found on the AHRC’s Connected Communities web pages at:

www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Pages/connectedcommunities.aspx