



Real Life Methods

Part of the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods

Connected Lives: understanding networks, neighbourhoods and communities

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<http://www.reallifemethods.ac.uk/research/connected/>



Outline

- The methodology: investigating networks, neighbourhoods and communities.
- Our focus tonight is on three substantive themes from the research. Our aim is to stimulate a discussion around the implications of these themes for policy and practice. These are:
 - Inequalities in Hyde Park and Burley Road; how they are experienced and how they might be addressed.
 - The relationships between long-term residents and more transient groups like students and young professionals; the implications of these relationships for building neighbourliness and community.
 - Senses of ordinary change; fears and hopes for the future of Hyde Park / Burley Road.

About the Connected Lives Research

A methodological project exploring networks, neighbourhood and communities.

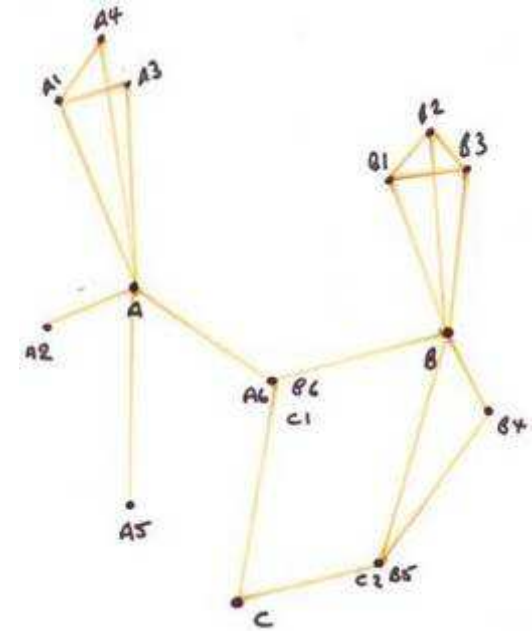
- What methods are appropriate for understanding networks, neighbourhoods, and communities?
- How can different methods be combined to create different kinds of insights and *real life* accounts of networks, neighbourhoods, and communities?
- How do people understand their networks, neighbourhoods, and communities?
- How are networks, neighbourhoods, and communities built, maintained, & dissembled in different contexts?

Methods & approach

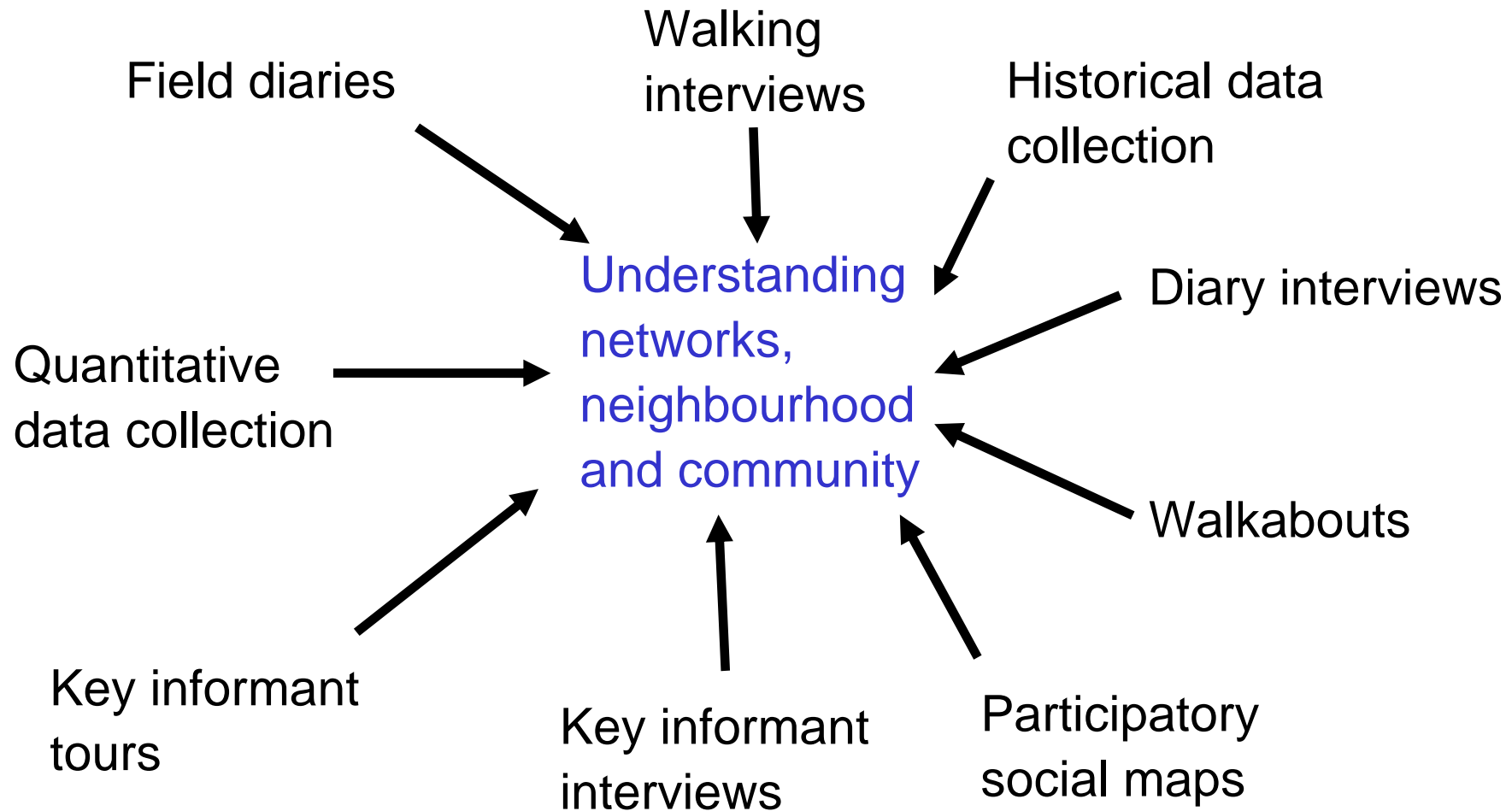
- The traditional way in which we investigate networks: setting the boundaries first and network analysis

Qualitatively-driven, mixed-method

- Qualitative methods: visual, narrative, mobile, in place
- Participatory approaches
- Quantitative methods: secondary data, maps



Methods & approach



The sample

- We selected the geographical area because of its apparent heterogeneity
- The sample reflects the demography of students / BME groups / young professionals / long-term residents
- A focus on people aged 18-30 years old
- Methods for accessing hard-to-reach and socially excluded groups used successfully
- The importance of key-informants
- Working with small-N sample sizes

Evidence of inequalities

AC: Is there anything else that you'd have wanted to take a picture of?

*ED: Erm. Just some of the mess. I just don't think it's a very [pause] I think it's sad that people, cos people who live in this area are either students or, I'm generalising but presumably of low socio-economic status and I don't think it's fair that people like that have to live in conditions which, OK, here's not as bad as somewhere obviously much poorer like a council [estate]... I just think things like this are not [pause] If you lived in a middle class area that would never happen
(WI with ED, p60)*

ED is a student who has lived in the area for 12 months

Inequalities

DLT: Half the kids round here ain't been nowhere do you get me?

AC: Yeah.

DLT: You know. They're lucky if they fucking go, mind my language, don't even go on a day trip.

AC: Yeah.

DLT: Do you know what I mean? Some do.

AC: Why do you think that is?...

DLT: Because they have that many kids they can't afford it...

you know, they've got all different kids and it costs em hundreds of pounds"

(WI with DLT, p12)

DLT is 26 years old, a long term resident of Leeds and recently moved into her socially-rented home with her 2 pre-school age daughters

Building bridges

DM: You know its budgeting what gets you in the nick, in the nick because you don't, you have to pay your TV license and you have to pay your water and your gas and then summat changes and then you get a deduction and then summat else happens entirely after that and it just muddles, messes with your head.

AC: Yeah. Does anyone else, do you have to do all that on your own or does anyone help you? (overlapping).

DM: Yeah erm there's Claire that helps me.

AC: Yeah.

DM: And Lisa. (Long pause) Sure Start.

(PM with DM, p8)

DM is 25 years old, mother of 3 pre-school children, 2 of whom are at nursery. She grew up in the area and lives in a socially rented house

... but they are weak bridges that do not address many needs

DM: Erm, no, they were just walking round knocking on doors.

AC: Okay. Yeah.

DM: So then I thought, "Fuck it. I'll get it."

AC: Yeah, yeah.

DM: You know what I mean?

AC: Yeah.

DM: That's how I got my widescreen TV.

AC: Right. Yeah.

DM: You know. So that were good for the kids.

AC: Yeah, yeah.

DM: I mean one time they've come back and said, "Oh you haven't paid a coup', you haven't been paying a couple of payments."

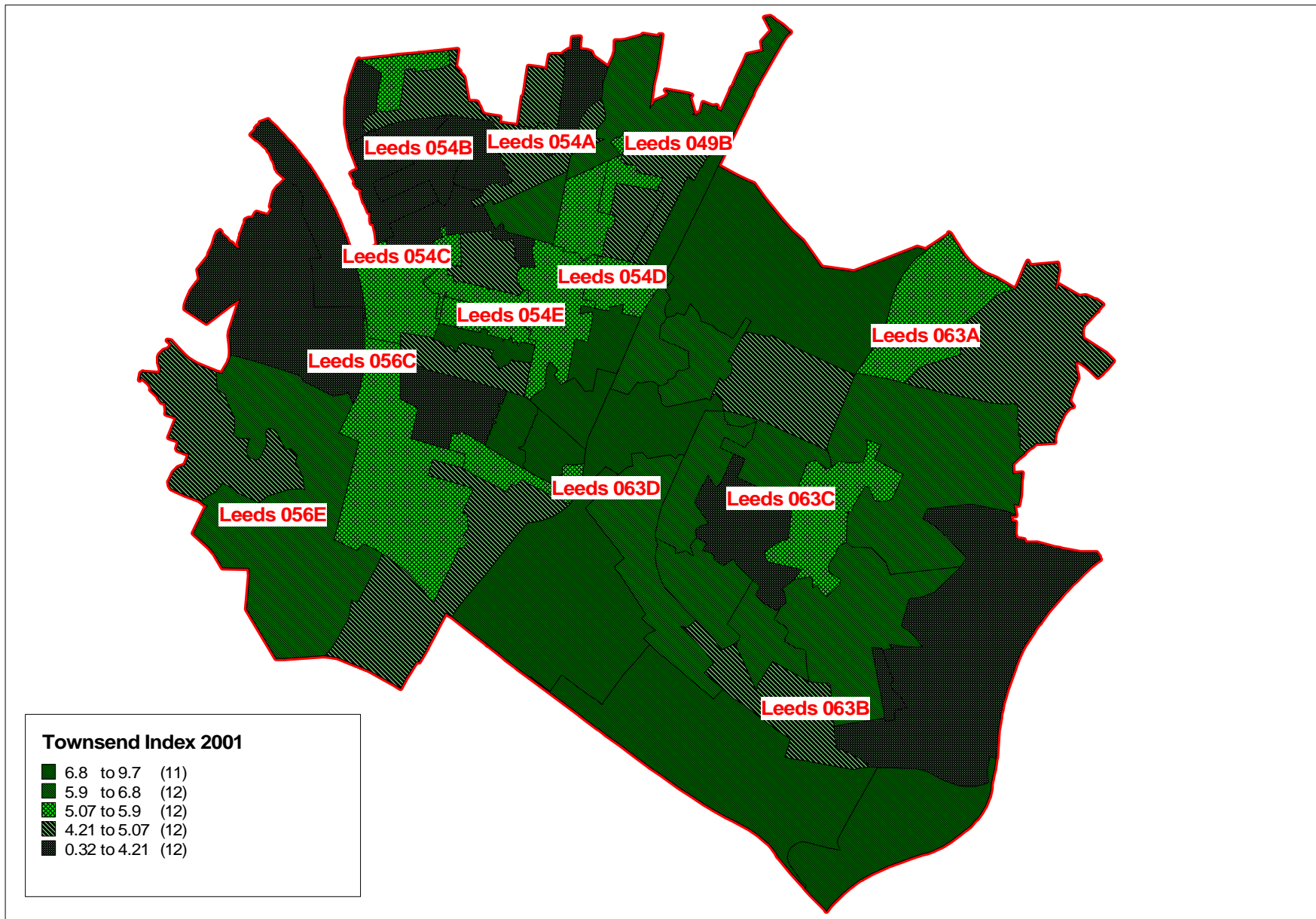
AC: Yeah.

DM: You're gonna have to give me thirty quid. I'll take your TV away, and then I'll bring it back on Friday."

AC: Right.

DM: So I said, "All right." I said, "Bring it back Friday." I gave him thirty quid, came back, brought the TV back. He said, "I wasn't even supposed to do that, you know. I was supposed to just take your TV." I were like, "Well you can't, you can't take TV cos of the kids."

(WI with DM, p47)



Townsend Index 2001 (Source: ERPHO based on 2001 Census data) Note: The higher the score the more disadvantaged the area (prepared by Lisa Buckner, University of Leeds)

Emerging policy themes

- Dealing with diversity
- Focussing provision
- Individual solutions to inequalities in health / social exclusion / worklessness / absolute, relative, and emotional poverty
- Sharing cultural and social capital through building bridges

Relationships in a mixed community



Living with students

- Our findings do not deny that there are tensions and problems:
 - For non-student residents:
Impact on sense of wellbeing; ‘depressing’ seeing neighbours come and go; isolation during holidays; sense of impermanence; uncertainty; noise.
 - Pressures on services e.g. rubbish collection, pressure on street maintenance

... but there are also positives experiences of living with students

- Local economy (formal and informal)
- Sense of vibrancy
- An exotic other

*“Where I come from in [city x] there’s not much choice of grocers, there’s no small shops like this. You need to get all your shopping in the supermarket really. And what I really like about Leeds is there’s lots of small shops. I’ve been to the supermarket once since I got here in September”
(WI with ED, p4)*

(ED is a student who has lived in the area for 12 months)

AC: Yeah. What do you like about living around so many students?

GC: Erm there is always, I don’t know it just makes it feel busy that’s what I like about it. Like, I don’t know. The streets are always like full of people.

AC: Yeah.

GC: But when they’re away its just really quiet.

AC: Yeah.

GC: It’s like a ghost town or something.

AC: Right. Which do you prefer?

GC: Erm I don’t know it’s nice to have a break from people coming home really late and shouting like –

AC: Yeah.

GC: On the street and stuff but then it’s too quiet when they’re not here.

(WI with GC, p5)

(GC is an 18 year old non-student resident)

Transient groups are part of the everyday life of Hyde Park / Burley Road

- Eyes on the street; engaging in acts of neighbouring
 - taking in parcels, looking out for neighbours, playing with kids on the street.
- We need to get beyond binary thinking of students as positive or negative. They are part of the everyday life of people who live in Hyde Park / Burley Road

Students are proud to live in Hyde Park

AC: And you're wearing an LS6 top.

AR: Yes

AC: What does that mean?

AR: It's the postcode I think. I guess it's something to do with being proud of the area. Really. A lot of students wear them and I can't really explain why but it seems to be a trendy thing to do so I thought I'd buy one. I needed a new hoodie so I thought I'd get one.

AC: And do you think it is because your proud of it?

AR: Yeah I think it does actually. I guess I am proud of where I live. And when I go home I think it's something, there's this degree of pride when you're wearing it. Your friends say what's that? And you go oh you know, I'm from Headingley.

AC: What is that pride?

AR: I don't know. I like Headingley. I like where I live. It's really good. I don't know what word I can use.

(WI with AR, p7)

AR is a 20 year old student who has chosen to live in the same house for 2 years



Community coming together for long-term residents of Hyde Park / Burley Road

DM: You know like, what I can say about Hyde, Hyde Park community, when there's, er, like events, like say Unity Day, or other events that are, they all come together. (overlapping)

AC: Yeah.

DM's Friend: Everybody coming together. (overlapping)

DM: And you can see, yeah, you can see 'em as a community. (WI with DM and friend, p13)

DM is 25 years old, mother of 3 pre-school children, 2 of whom are at nursery. She grew up in the area and lives in a socially rented House. DM's friend is also in her 20s and has lived in the area all her life.



Neighbourhood and community in Hyde Park / Burley Road

"Somebody has said that in order to know a community, one must observe the style of its funerals and know the manner of men (and women) they bury with most ceremony"

(Twain M [1872] 1985 "Roughing it": p336)

Building neighbourliness and community in a mixed neighbourhood

- Both long-term and transient residents have strong locally-grounded networks
- But, there are limited links between people's networks and communities
- There are, however, some very good examples of attempts to build bridges between communities - Unity day, VCFS organisations, public sector

Building community

The Communities and Local Government White Paper, “Communities in control: real people, real power” (pg. 21) observes that people:

“need also to be convinced that their involvement will make a difference. If they speak up, they want to know that their voices will be heard.”

and further that:

“Strong social networks, good community spirit and a local sense of belonging and place, are foundations for confident and healthy communities.”

Re-defining Hyde Park / Burley

A muddled geography

AC: But there are fewer students down where your mum lives [around Burley Lodge]?

IJ: Yeah.

AC: Right. And where you were [living] in Headingley were there students around there?

IJ: Erm. No.

(DI with IJ, p14-15)

IJ moved to the area with his family a few years ago. He is in his late teens. He recently moved out of a hostel and has recently returned to college.

AC: Is there any difference between Hyde Park and Burley?

MX: Burley's got more students than Hyde Park"

(WI with MX, p10)

MX is in her 20s. She has lived in northwest Leeds all her life. She recently moved into her first socially rented home with her young daughter.

And some different views of the neighbourhood...

AC: What's the area like?

GC: Er I don't, these two streets are pretty quiet but if you go like a few streets further down then you get into the estate and then it's just like, there's always like police and everything on the estate"

(WI with GC, p2-3)

GC is an 18 year old non-student resident. He lives with his father and other family members.

AC: What do you not like about living in Hyde Park and Burley?

IJ: Burglaries

AC: Right. In what sense?

IJ: Cos I'll probably get mugged before I leave.

AC: Do you think so? Why do you say that?

*IJ: It's the most robbed area of Britain... cos they're vulnerable students,
(DI with IJ, p13)*

AC: What do you think of the area?

MC: Er. It's pretty good.

AC: Yeah? In what sense?

MC: Quiet. You know. Not much crime.

(WI with MC, p6)

MC is in his early 20s. He recently moved into his first socially rented flat in the area after living in a hostel.

The area is dynamic: There is a sense of ordinary change

J: Hyde Park's an all year round holiday. I wouldn't live, I wouldn't want t' be nowhere else

AC: Most the people you grew up with are they still there as well?

J: Some of 'em yeah.

AC: Right.

J: Some of 'em have moved away or been locked up or just doing their own thing, working.

AC: Yeah. And are you not bothered with students and stuff up there? No?

J: Not really, no. The women are nice.

(J during WI with MX, p29)

J is in his early 20s. He has lived in the area all his life and currently does not work.

Feelings of loss and disinvestment in the area

Institutional change

MX: I'd have liked [my daughter] to go to that school cos me and [my partner] both went to that school.

AC: Yeah?

MX: So it would have been nice for her to go there... just like a tradition (WI with MX, p6-7)

MX is in her 20s. She has lived in northwest Leeds all her life. She recently moved into her first socially rented home with her young daughter.



Feeling unsafe

Safety

GC: Er...there are some places I won't walk on me own at night.

AC: Where will you not go?

GC: Sometimes I won't walk through Hyde Park on me own.

AC: The actual park?

GC: Yeah.

AC: Why's that?

GC: Because just the stuff that goes on in there, like there's people been raped and stuff and drug addicts. A lot of drug addicts sleep in there.

AC: Yeah.

GC: So that's fucking scary.

(WI with GC, p24-25)

GC is an 18 year old non-student resident. He lives with his father and other family members.

Community and university

- Leeds University is not seen as such a good neighbour: A distant, rich, feudal institution that does not play a part in the lives of its neighbours.
- For many residents Leeds University is a no-go area. Many people who live within easy walking distance have never stepped foot in the University precincts.
- Community groups get by with meagre facilities while looking in on an institution with sports halls, teaching and conference rooms far superior to those available for their use.
- Few understand what Leeds University does, who it teaches, what research it is involved in doing, and the contributions it makes to the local and global economy.

Questioning some myths

- The 1995 riots are part of a shameful history that needs to be hidden.
 - The disturbances have become part of local ‘legend’; unknown, forgotten and ‘misremembered’ because of the major turnover of student and graduate residents. But they continue to contribute to a strong local identity for others.
- Change-over weekend is a nuisance that creates a mess.
 - An opportunity to furnish houses and make some money
- The community is apathetic, there is no one left who cares about the area.
 - Political interests span beyond the local. There is evidence of local involvement in voluntary and community activities and campaigns in all parts of the community.

Questioning some myths

- There is a loss of community in Hyde Park / Burley Road; families move out because of students; “there is no one left”.
 - This is undeniable in some area, but varies substantially and is not entirely due to students.
 - Students and graduates have dense local social networks, and make considerable use of local services.
 - Some students have built networks of trust locally... *“this is the veg shop... the men are really nice. If you don’t have enough money they say just pay tomorrow” (WI with ED, p47).*
- The area is declining because of greater pressure on resources, environmental and housing decay, and community change.
 - Yet people talk about quite different types of change:
 - J: [Hyde Park] changes all the time*
 - AC: Yeah?*
 - J: Middle Classes are up there now...*
 - (comment from J during WI with MX, p30)*

Conclusions / key messages

Hyde Park is diverse. There are individuals and families living in absolute poverty alongside their relatively affluent neighbours. The area is a dynamic changing place. Long-term residents recognise this. It will continue to change, perhaps through reduced numbers of students living in the area or students living in purpose built housing rather than multiple occupancy terraced houses.

A polarized view of students (and other transient groups) versus community fails to capture the ways in which these groups are valued. There is evidence that they play a role in the community and have the potential to do much more.

Conclusions / key messages

Some of this potential is seen in young professionals, many of whom are graduates, who play an active role in voluntary activities and community life in Hyde Park / Burley Road.

There, are particular concerns to be addressed around institutional change and safety, for example.

Service delivery in the public and voluntary sectors is addressing many issues in creative and effective ways.

Perhaps the most significant challenge to policy and practice is to identify ways to tap into and release the social and cultural capital in the area to the benefit of all those in the community, in particular those living in absolute poverty.