

# **Re-thinking neighbourhood effects: integrating economic & social institutions**

Chris Phillipson

**MICRA/SOCIOLOGY**

## Areas for discussion

- Community and neighbourhood studies in the UK
- Why neighbourhood?
- Do neighbourhood effects exist?
- Challenges for neighbourhood research
- A new research agenda

# Community and neighbourhood studies in the UK

Important part of development of sociology:

- Studies of 'single industry' communities (e.g. mining, fishing, shipbuilding)
- Institute of Community Studies (Young, Townsend, Willmott)
- Repeat Studies (Banbury, St.Anne's, Bethnal Green (Tower Hamlets))
- Oral History (Thompson, Samuel)

# The influence of 'area'/neighbourhoods in shaping UK public policy

Urban Aid Programme (1968)

Educational Priority Areas (1968)

Community Development Programme (1969)

'Six Town Studies' focus on inner cities (1972)

'Transmitted deprivation research programme' (1972)

Quality of Life Studies (1973)

Social Exclusion Unit (1997-2010)

# Disenchantment with community/neighbourhood research

- Problems of defining community (Bulmer, 1981)
- ‘de-localisation’ of everyday life with globalisation
- ‘Disappearance’ of communities from public view (Buofino & Mulgan 2006)
  
- Problem of replication – real change? Or just shift in theoretical perspectives or experiences in the field
- Interest in approach which give less priority to place (e.g. network analysis) (Bott 1957; Wellman et al. 1988)
- Influence of Marxist and feminist perspectives

## Why study neighbourhoods?

‘Neighbourhoods ...can be seen as categories through which people and organizations – including government agencies and neighbourhood organizations – give meaning to their reality and through which they structure action. After all, when people and organizations perceive neighbourhoods as real, they are real in their consequences’. (van Kempen & Wissink 2014)

## But are their neighbourhood effects?

- Yes, **but** small in comparison to individual and household characteristics (van Kempen & Wissink 2014)
- Yes, **but** depends upon how long people have lived in the neighbourhood (Krause 2003)
- Yes, **but** not spread in a uniform way across all subpopulations and settings (Small & Feldman 2012)

## But are their neighbourhood effects?

- Yes, **but** different in different neighbourhoods and different cities (Small & Feldman 2015)
- Yes, **but** more important for some groups than others (e.g. older people versus young professionals; 'elected' versus 'excluded')
- Yes, **but** cohort replacement within neighbourhoods need to be considered (Kelly-Moore & Thorpe 2012)



## Key problems for neighbourhood research

‘...surprisingly little evidence that living in poor neighbourhoods makes people poorer and erodes their life chances, independently of those factors that contribute to poverty in the first place’ (Cheshire 2007)

‘...neighbourhood effects [may be] the study of the symptoms of urban inequality rather than the ultimate cause’. (van Ham & Manley 2012; van Ham et al. 2012).

# The challenges

- Move away from **point-in-time measures**
- Broaden range of **dependent variables** (e.g. use of well-being)
- Improved **operationalization** of concept of neighbourhood
- Consideration of other **spatial** contexts
- Integration of **ethnography**

(van Ham & Manley 2012)

## Limitation of these challenges

- Detachment from political economy of the city (e.g. Harvey 2012; Wacquant 2008)
- Failure to link with 'larger social structures': or 'translating private troubles into public issues' (C W Mills 1959)
- Lack of inter-disciplinarity (Urban geography, urban sociology, planning, cultural sociology)
- Lack of attention to impact of 'mobilities'/transnational migration

## Key challenge: how to integrate institutional processes into neighbourhood effects

- ‘To forget that urban space is a historical and political construction in the strong sense of the term is to risk (mis)taking for ‘neighbourhood effects’ what is nothing more than the spatial retranslation of economic and social differences’  
(Wacquant 2008)
- **Or are neighbourhood effects simply the effects of the state projected onto the city?**

# The methodological challenge: Studying precarious neighbourhoods

- Polarization from 'below' (multiplication of vulnerable positions and 'above' (powerful confined to specific social and physical places)
- Labour insecurity
- Stigmatization of welfare beneficiaries
- Drive to make neighbourhoods responsible for the care of the vulnerable
- Neighbourhoods as 'no care' zones
- Segregation between poor and rich
- Conflict between groups

(Black 2009; Standing 2010; Estes et al. 1992; McKenzie 2015; Wacquant 2008)

## Research agenda

- Incorporate debate around: ‘spatial justice’ (Soja 2010), ‘territorial justice’ (Davies 1968), ‘rights to the city’ (Harvey 2012)
- Trade off between private development and public use – Sennett’s fall of public man (or: ‘Who owns the streets?’ (Minton 2009)
- Integrate political economy of urban development with the study of neighbourhood effects (Zukin 2010)
- ‘Strong’ rather than ‘weak’ ethnographies (Black 2009)

# Spatial consciousness and the neighbourhood effect

- Importance of recognising that the geographies in which we live can have both positive negative effects on our lives. They are not just dead background or a neutral physical stage for the human drama but are filled with material and imagined forces that affect us...in nearly everything we do...**This is a vitally important part of the new spatial consciousness, making us aware that the geographies in which we live can sustain our exploitation as workers, support oppressive forms of cultural and political domination based on race, gender, and nationality, and aggravate all forms of discrimination and injustice. Without this recognition, space is little more than a background complication'** (Soja 2010)

## Selected references

Allan, G & Phillipson, C Community Studies Today: urban perspectives Int.Jrn.Soc.Res.Methods 11 (2) 2008

Harvey, D (2012) Rebel Cities Verso

Small, M & Feldman, J (2012) Ethnographic evidence, heterogeneity, and neighbourhood effects after moving to opportunity. In van Ham (ed) Neighbourhood effects research. Springer

van Kempen, R & Wissink, B (2014) Between places and flows: towards a new agenda for neighbourhood research in an age of mobility. Swedish Society for Anthropology and Geography



## SELECTED REFERENCES

Kelly-Moore, J. & Thorpe, R Age in place and place in age: advancing the inquiry on neighbourhoods and minority older adults Whitfield, K (ed) Handbook of Minority Aging, Springer, 2012

Soja, E. Seeking Spatial Justice University of Minnesota Press 2010

van Ham, M. & Manley, D (2012) Neighbourhood effects research at a crossroads: ten challenges for future research. IZA

Wacquant, L (2008) Urban Outcasts Polity

Zukin, S (2010) Naked City. OUP