

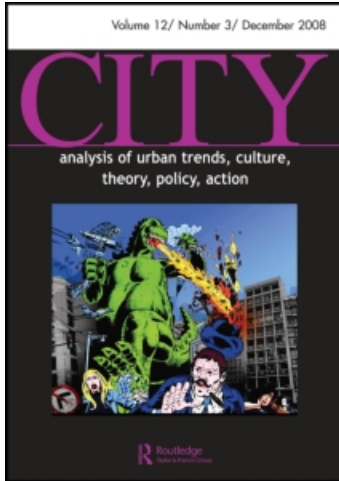
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Building resilience and well-being in the Margins within the City

Changing perceptions, making connections, realising potential, plugging resources leaks

Rachael Unsworth, Sue Ball, Irena Bauman, Paul Chatterton, Andrew Goldring, Katie Hill and Guy Julier

Regeneration policy in the UK has failed to deliver real gains for many of the inner-city neighbourhoods that it was meant to help, but particularly those on the margins of our most prosperous and affluent city centres. In Leeds in 2008 an independent group of professionals came together through a project called 'Margins within the City' to challenge thinking about regeneration in the city. We wanted to find new ways of understanding the neighbourhoods in the rim around the city centre, uncover the potential of these neighbourhoods for future resilience and well-being and suggest ways forward. A year-long programme of action research was undertaken to pilot an approach to investigating the social networks, skills and enterprise, and under-utilised land and buildings in a case study neighbourhood. This paper shows the approach and method for the research, the cross-cutting themes within the findings and the recommendations for future policy development. It suggests that if social and physical connections are mended, established and extended, then perceptions can be radically changed, resource and ecological leaks plugged, and under-utilised potential more fully realised.

Key words: city, regeneration, community, climate change, resilience, well-being, social networks, Leeds, deprivation

Introduction

These are indeed interesting, difficult and challenging times, and not least for thinking about and acting on the future regeneration of cities. A number of stresses are being felt in urban areas:

there are the continuing problems of poverty and inequality; environmental threats are mounting as the climate changes; and economic uncertainty and hardship have worsened as the speculative, free-market model exhibits a major crisis compounded by energy and other resource

scarcities and associated price inflation. These stresses make it imperative to find new ways of creating city futures to respond to ecological overstretch, social friction and economic malaise. We recognise that Leeds, in the North of England, like many other old industrial cities throughout the developed world, is at an important crossroads and the time is ripe for galvanising debate and action, especially as there has recently been a change of government. This paper reports on a year-long process of action research by a community interest company in the UK called 'Leeds Love It Share It' (LLISI), comprised of academics, an architect, a permaculturalist and art and design practitioners. We came together in 2008 committed to exploring new visions of how Leeds could be in the future and to identifying the skills and ideas that will be needed to deal with the challenges ahead. Our first project was called 'Margins within the City'.

During this work we found a willingness amongst statutory agencies to enter into debate about regeneration policy due to its failure so far to deliver substantial gains for deprived communities. Of particular interest to us is how to recognise untapped areas of potential by challenging and going beyond the business-as-usual urban policy orthodoxy, and how to enable communities to realise this potential to build their own resilience strategies and improve well-being. We stress four routes to achieving this: changing negative perceptions of the area, strengthening and making connections across social networks, realising the potential of under-utilised assets, and plugging the leaks of resources and economic activities. This paper is the beginning of our thinking.

The agenda for change: the end of business as usual?

Our work comes at a crucial stage for policy and action on urban regeneration and renewal. There is a sense that the pro-growth,

business-as-usual approach is discredited, and that persistent ills have not been resolved. Worryingly, at the same time there is not yet a clear policy direction in terms of how to rethink and apply urban regeneration policy in ways that could yield a step change in well-being and sustainability outcomes. This should be a major concern given the profound and widely acknowledged challenges ahead: financial and resource constraints coupled with climate change.

Before looking at the challenges ahead, we need to consider the outcomes delivered to date through different methods. A decade of central government-led orthodoxies, such as Urban Renaissance and Neighbourhood Renewal, has had important benefits for post-industrial cities (Jones and Evans, 2008). However, despite attempts to move on from property-led and enterprise-oriented approaches to make integrated and holistic interventions, targeted on the areas of greatest need (McCarthy, 2007), their limitations are becoming clearer (Syrett and North, 2008; Lichfield, 2009). Even with strong economic growth and significant public sector expenditure, inequalities persist (Joyce *et al.*, 2010) and contrasts between areas of prosperity and deprivation remained stubbornly entrenched (Dorling *et al.*, 2007; Dorling, 2010). Boddy and Parkinson (2004, p. 428) summarise this paradoxical geography by stating that 'competitive success is far from incompatible with persistent concentrations of unemployment and social deprivation' and that 'competitive success does not eliminate inequality or concentrated disadvantage'. Contrasts are unlikely to be entirely erased, but some community-based initiatives have shown that it is possible to use innovative approaches to generate substantial improvements. These include: the Goodwin Development Trust, set up as a charitable organisation in 1994 by residents of the Thornton Estate in Hull to improve their quality of life and the services available on their estate; Glasgow 2020 Vision a project that developed a future vision for Glasgow unconstrained by institutional interests; Imagine Chicago, a non-

profit organisation in existence since 1992 which aims to cultivate 'hope and civic engagement in a variety of cross cultural and intergenerational initiatives, projects and programs' (Imagine Chicago website) and begun by a city-wide Appreciative Enquiry process; Transition Towns, originating in Totnes, UK, which provides methods for building community resilience for a post-carbon future; the Eldonians in Liverpool who have turned a housing estate around using a housing co-operative model; Coin Street Community Builders founded in 1977 to resist a large-scale hotel and office development that would have had a major negative impact on this small London community; the BalanCity Project, an urban renewal project that works with Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD); Biz-Fizz, an approach developed jointly by New Economics Foundation (NEF) and the Civic Trust in 2001 to provide business support to people in communities experiencing economic disadvantage, and challenge the misconception that there is a lack of entrepreneurs and enterprising ideas in these communities. Many of these innovative experiments seem to have occurred in spite of the state rather than via its mechanisms.

While approaches to urban regeneration have varied and evolved, so have the nature of governance structures and the role of the public sector. From the 1980s, the public sector moved from a 'public administration' approach of centralised bureaucracies to so-called New Public Management (Osborne and McLaughlin, 2002; DuGay, 2004). Performance measurement and ratings, responsiveness to public demand and contracting out to competitive tendering have gradually become features which brought the culture of public services closer to the private sector. A third phase, still in development, is 'network governance'. Here, 'the role of the state is to steer action within complex social systems rather than control solely through hierarchy or market mechanisms' (Hartley, 2005, p. 30). This phase has been accelerated by the new environment of fiscal austerity: public sector

spending was cut in 2009 and even more substantially in the emergency budget of 2010. Welfare and development responsibilities will be 'downloaded' from central government to local authorities and neighbourhoods (Aylett, 2010), with voluntary sector organisations expected to step into the service delivery gap: not-for-profit companies, charities and local groups. This new regime has huge implications for already precarious and deprived communities. Is it possible to achieve a creative fusion of the most fruitful elements of autonomous, community-based experiments with support from the pared-down state, and still deliver good quality services (Bichard, 2008)? Maybe the new government's talk of 'big society' can be turned into a workable option after the failure, in turn, of 'big government' and 'big market' (see Blond, 2010)? New strategies for urban renewal, as well as their management and delivery, may be more 'co-created' and community-led (Promise/LSE Enterprise, 2009). This can embed resilience thinking into policy which moves away from command-and-control managerial approaches and instead embraces interconnections, complexity and adaptation (Walker and Salt, 2006).

Such moves may make it more possible for communities to rise to the challenges of climate change and resource shortages. Urban regeneration has to contribute more towards reducing carbon emissions and also respond to the high likelihood of changing patterns and greater extremes of temperature, precipitation and wind (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007). The failure of the UN climate negotiation process to reach substantive international agreement has suggested that citizens and local authorities must increasingly take the lead (Bulkeley and Betsill, 2003). Some progress is being made with climate change strategies at local authority level, for example, the Cities for Climate Protection Campaign, and the World Mayors' and Municipal Leaders' Declaration on Climate Change. In the UK, the core cities have signed the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change and Leeds City Council has

adopted its own climate change strategy (Leeds City Council, 2009).

The test for cities is to take radical action to mitigate climate change when fundamental lifestyle shifts in contentious areas such as car dependence, air travel and overall levels of consumption are implied. In fact, the UK Climate Change Act 2008 and evolving local authority policies give a stronger framework for action, but individual city authorities consider themselves relatively powerless to interfere in individual consumption decisions, nor do they want to be associated with actions that might prejudice their city's economic competitive position or reduce their electability. Moreover, there remain established and new environmental justice issues which cities have to deal with, such as the siting of incinerators.

Since 2006, with the publication of the latest set of IPCC reports and the Stern Review, the climate change agenda has tended to overtake the wider sustainability agenda as a priority for policy formulation and implementation (While *et al.*, 2009). What must not be overlooked in the rush to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are broader holistic outcomes that pay attention to environmental, social and economic factors together, in effect to endorse actions that not only have beneficial effects in terms of combining climate change mitigation and adaptation (Howard, 2009) but also improve or create opportunities for enhanced economic prosperity and community well-being (Brown and Corbera, 2003; Greenstein *et al.*, 2007; Rydin, 2009; Morecroft and Cowan, 2010). Embedding a climate justice perspective is essential for poorer neighbourhoods, where priorities remain better home energy efficiency, public transport and access to local opportunities that will enhance their earning potential and access to affordable fresh food.

Most recently, the climate change and energy agendas have come together (Hopkins, 2008; Lovell *et al.*, 2009). As well as needing to reduce carbon emissions, we will in any case need to recognise the profound implications of the peaking of oil and gas supplies: a way of

life that has been predicated on the profligate use of cheap fuel will be under threat (Heinberg, 2005; Kunstler, 2005) and thus so will the underlying structure and functioning of the economic and social base of cities (Atkinson, 2007a, 2007b, 2008; Girardet, 2008). There seems little alternative but to devise and implement a new macro-economics for urban sustainability with an emphasis on minimising throughput, harnessing new sources of energy and maximising well-being, as argued by Tim Jackson (2009) in his report for the government's Sustainable Development Commission. The concept of 'prosperity without growth' can only be operationalised if the focus is principally on mobilising and enhancing social capital, not principally on investing in material consumption and physical assets. This includes tackling systemic inequality (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009; Cabinet Office, 2010) and measuring prosperity in new terms to include healthy life expectancy, educational participation, trust and other non-economic indicators that make up the concept of well-being (New Economics Foundation, 2010). Forms of urban policy are needed that are not simply geared towards maximising property values and returns on investment but instead promote a diverse, locally responsive and needs-based economy. This would take climate change and energy scarcity seriously, and begin to draw on the untapped potential of neighbourhoods to help deliver prosperity and sustainability.

Margins within the City: developing an approach to re-valuing under-utilised assets

Leeds Love It Share It used this context to explore how inner cities can respond to these rapidly changing circumstances in innovative ways. Our overall concern was that despite the economic boom in Leeds (mainly based on financial, legal and other services) and the various efforts to 'narrow the gap' (Leeds Initiative, 2004), the poverty gap between the City Centre and the neighbourhoods situated

closest to it was growing rather than shrinking (Hodkinson and Chatterton, 2007). This ‘rim’ forms a collar of disconnection, deprivation and neglect that surrounds the prosperous core (Bauman Lyons Architects, 2006), creating ‘Margins within the City’. Most of the rim falls within the lowest 3% of Super Output Areas (SOAs) nationally (Communities and Local Government, 2008). Yet these neighbourhoods have more to them than the official designations of deprivation suggest. They contain enormous potential which is under-utilised by the residents and under-appreciated by those who do not know the area well. They represent a significant resource in responding to the kinds of challenges outlined above. We sought to develop a methodology and a programme of action research that could understand the value of these rim areas and document, make visible and re-value their potential. Can the under-utilised assets in the margins be protected and nurtured to deal with future challenges rather than left exposed and vulnerable to the encroachment of speculative development and the vagaries of the free market?

Policymakers within the city were the primary target audience for this research, and by working alongside strategic partners throughout the project we developed thinking related to a series of questions about the links between policy and communities. These included considering how to build effective policy by starting from the current position of people/communities, using the kinds of resources that are already available (Rowson, 2009; Foot and Hopkins, 2010) rather than an approach that relies solely on an input of resources into a neighbourhood in order for it to regenerate. How can the range of localised skills and networks and large tracts of publicly owned land in the inner-city rim be used to deal with the challenges of financial austerity, climate change and energy scarcity? How can policy be devised that values locals as experts, and that builds interconnections between people, buildings, land and skills to realise value that can be harnessed by the locality? Given more

scope to determine their own futures and realise and manage these assets, communities in the rim have real potential to create their own resilience strategies. The important point for us is to shift perceptions away from narratives of wastage and deprivation towards an investigation of under-used potential within the neighbourhood and the most effective usage of public funding and expertise that does exist—‘the infusion of key external resources at critical points’, as Dale and Newman put it (2008, p. 11).

Ultimately we hoped that the research would also find an audience amongst local activists and individuals, and would become a vehicle for exploring how structures may be created to devolve service delivery and ownership of the asset base to the local residents, and how communities can mobilise around a new agenda for ensuring prosperity, well-being and sustainability.

We developed a research practice based on a number of principles articulating the values of our group. Carefully considered but flexible structures were developed to manage the work and provide an environment for research that was both robust and also able to accommodate the dynamism and complexity of a very messy qualitative research process that inevitably had to be adapted as we learned about the opportunities and limitations in the ‘field’. We were not aiming to consult the local residents and stakeholders about their reactions to a pre-conceived set of ideas. Rather, we embarked on action research (Reason and Bradbury, 2001) to draw out the issues considered relevant and using a reflexive practice which constantly monitors complex evolving factors: the kinds of relations being established and the political dynamics acting upon the project and the participants; the nature and results of enquiry; and the impact of involvement. Our work is committed to openness and communication, enabling interested parties to see how we are working. Learning days during the intensive period of data gathering enabled us to reflect on the findings as we went along. There was an emphasis on mulling over the data in multiple ways to draw out meanings.

Appreciative enquiry techniques (Elliott, 1999) enabled us to turn round the perception of ‘problems’ and ‘waste’ to articulate instead the unrealised potential of the area.¹ Finally, we established collective responsibility to each other and those with whom we engaged during the research. This means being clear that we are not service deliverers but researchers interested in highlighting opportunities and new policy directions. We also made a clear undertaking that we would continue our involvement, if it was thought useful, helping the residents and others concerned with improving the area to act on our findings and

make connections into wider networks that might be able to influence policy, investment and well-being.

The ‘Margins within the City’ project focused on Richmond Hill, a part of Leeds that presents many characteristics typical of inner suburbs in UK post-industrial cities (Figure 1). These are both negative and positive. Richmond Hill is dominated by terraced housing of the industrial era, though many local factories have closed since the mid-20th century and there are streets dominated by transience, worklessness and crime. It also carries a number of other assets in its land

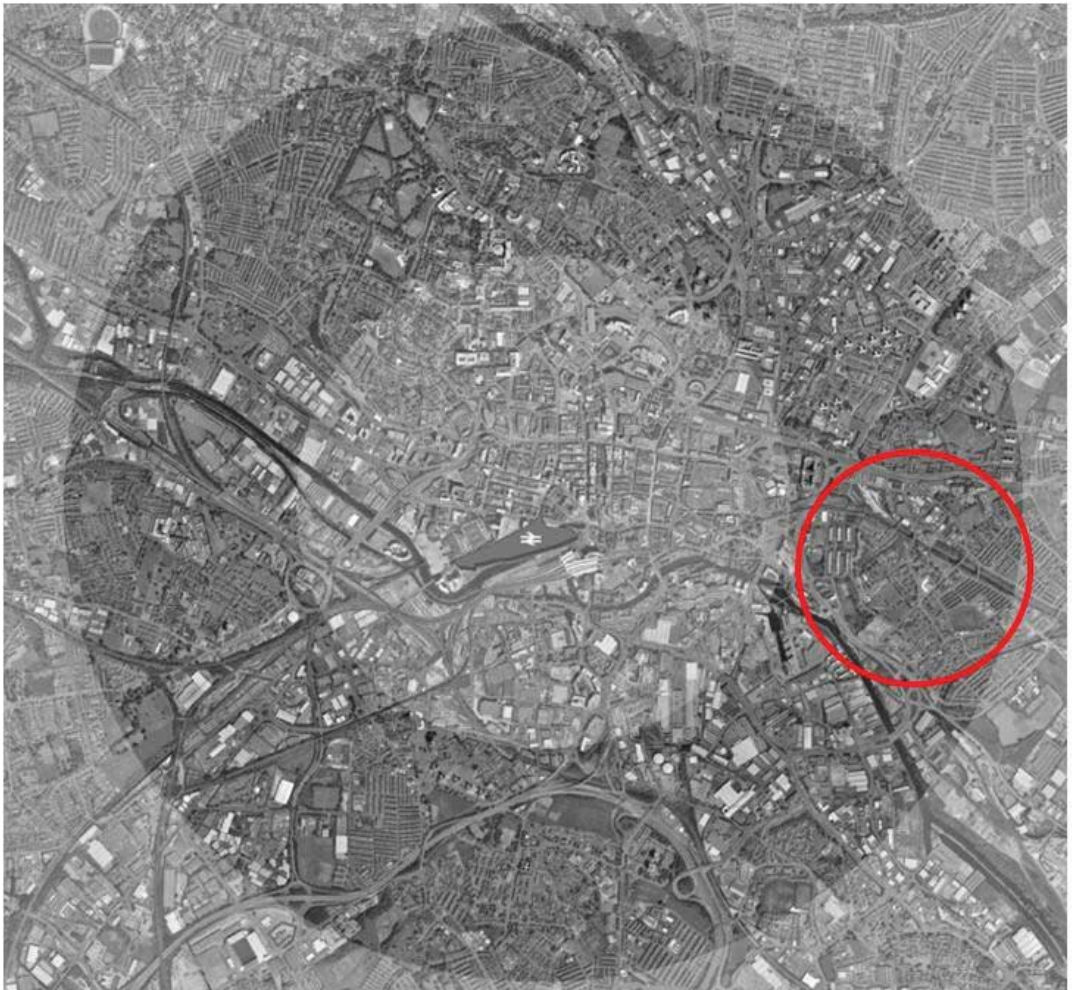


Figure 1 The Leeds ‘rim’ and Richmond Hill. *Source:* authors.

above the floodplain, its solid building stock and plentiful green spaces, views, density, social networks and skills base. It provides a variety of different types of affordable housing close to city centre employment opportunities for a range of households. Richmond Hill is of strategic interest at city and regional level as it stands adjacent to the city centre and the major development corridor of the Aire Valley. As a result, the area's identity and infrastructure have been changed as land has been acquired to provide new housing and infrastructure. There are both opportunities and threats, then, arising from the neighbourhood's geographical relationship to the rest of the city.

Below, we present the findings of our research through four inter-connected themes: changing perceptions; making, repairing and widening connections; plugging resource leaks; and realising under-utilised potential.

1. Changing perceptions: statistics, appearance, reality and potential

Our first theme relates to the importance of perceptions. The way an area is perceived, both internally and externally, has a significant influence at a number of levels. These include an ability to mobilise people and organisations, and a capacity to tell a story about a neighbourhood that can lead to positive outcomes. Richmond Hill shares with many poor inner-city areas a narrative of decline, neglect and conflict, some of which stems from a lack of recent investment and some prominent dereliction. Decline and neglect of the physical environment can have a significant impact on community well-being: the overall perception of a place in a spiral of decline reinforces low self-esteem amongst residents and undermines their ability to participate in the regeneration of their area. Local residents currently feel largely powerless to control or even influence how the area develops socially and physically and there is some cynicism about whether residents' voices are heard at all. The closure of

workplaces and facilities has undermined coherence, vibrancy and access to services.

These perceptions are largely based on a sequence of economic changes that started in the late 20th century (Illich, 1973) when many problems occurred that undermined the reputation and stability of such neighbourhoods. Industrial decline and worklessness underlay the rise of serious anti-social behaviour in some parts of Richmond Hill. As a substantial number of households moved to escape such stresses, their properties were mainly bought at low values by private (absentee) landlords. This enabled people from a variety of backgrounds and origins to access affordable housing (either paying their rent themselves or via Housing Benefit). As a result of these changes, there was an inward movement of more transient and unstable households (Jones *et al.*, 2004). Remaining longer term residents became more defensive and the authorities responded with a range of preventative and security measures: concrete bollards preventing joy riding, crash barriers protecting green areas from travellers, bars on windows and shutters on shops to prevent burglary (Figure 2). Signs warned of prohibited behaviour and dangers. Not all are necessarily required any more, yet these defensive features tend to be left in place once erected, reinforcing negative perceptions of the neighbourhood.

Changes in policing (the advent of police community support officers and new ways of



Figure 2 Defensive street design. Source: authors.

working) and the neighbourhood warden's work from 2003 have led to reduced levels of crime and anti-social behaviour. Residents' groups with dedicated leaders as well as extended services work in schools have helped to bring about improvements. While the area is not entirely transformed, it is less beset by problems than was the case at the turn of the millennium. There are no extensive areas of abandonment and the Index of Multiple Deprivation showed slight improvements between 2004 and 2007 (Communities and Local Government, 2008). The general negative perception of the area and quality of life for long-term residents and incomers could be further addressed by low intervention projects, led by the community, of removing, revealing, connecting and sprucing up, as suggested by Hamdi (2004). For example, bollards could be replaced by trees, green space better maintained, strong gateways and views could be enhanced. Way-finding signage, neighbourhood maps and a directory would aid movement, image and business opportunities.

However, delving below the neighbourhood's outward appearance we found a very different picture. We undertook a detailed story of a street, interviewing households door to door (Figure 3). What we found at this fine scale was a very varied place where most people were content to live, benefits dependency was far from the norm and the majority of adults of working age were in work. Our work highlights the crucial need to undertake detailed observation and start from exploring the daily reality as lived by residents of the area. These kinds of insights are vital to understanding the real, lived perceptions of local places, and are the building blocks of how to tell the story of any place.

2. Making connections: building social capital and networks

Our second theme is about social capital, defined as the collective resource embedded



Figure 3 Copperfields Grove, Cross Green: the story of a street. Source: authors.

in and released from informal social networks (Lin, 2002). Shared initiatives and solidarity, together with associated norms of behaviour, trust and cooperation, enable a society to function effectively (Putnam, 2000; Porritt, 2007). Societies with high levels of social capital show high levels of membership of social organisations, participation, volunteering and informal socialising. Putnam and other social capital researchers make a distinction between 'bonding' and 'bridging' social capital. Bonding is more inward looking: the building and reinforcing of ties between people with common characteristics, most particularly families. These are the relationships for 'getting by', the 'networks of necessity' (Hunter and Staggenborg, 1988, p. 253). Bridging networks are more outward looking and encompass people with non-homogeneous characteristics. These are the networks that enable people to 'get ahead'. 'Bonding social capital provides a kind of sociological superglue, whereas bridging social capital provides a sociological WD-40' (Putnam, 2000, p. 23). In addition, some researchers draw a distinction between 'bridging' and 'linking': the former is informal whereas the latter consists of involvement in structured voluntary organisations (Sabatini, 2008). The high sense of responsibility to reciprocate within a relatively small, tight network can stifle the chances of making links beyond the familiar networks

and reduce chances for innovation that wider, if weaker, bridging and linkages could bring (Granovetter, 1973; Gargiulo and Benassi, 2000; Green and White, 2007; Taylor *et al.*, 2007; Sabatini, 2008). Dale and Newman (2008) stress that while bonding is the stuff of community resilience, both linking and bridging are necessary for accessing additional kinds of capital, and they argue that vertical linkages to higher levels of governance are also critical for sustainable community development. Indeed, if bonding within communities is the dominant form of networking, it may be counter to community development if it engenders a closed mentality, lack of trust or prejudice (Porritt, 2005; Gilchrist, 2009).

Blokland and Rae (2008) show that the old patterns of linkages in neighbourhoods full of industrial workers and their families no longer have such dense and overlapping networks. With the end of large-scale industrialism, the migration of many workers into the service sector and the expansion of outer suburbs, the old rationale for working-class urban communities has been undermined and the people still inhabiting the 'inner cities' find themselves in somewhat hollowed out neighbourhoods with weakened bonding capital and a lack of effective bridging and linking. However, our interest is in exploring in detail the kinds of social capital that do exist, especially the social networks that are largely invisible to the outsider. Musterd *et al.* (2006) assert that not all concentrations of poverty are severely lacking in opportunities. Not all are isolated, few are substantially abandoned and without infrastructure and activities. They are just relatively less fortunate and perhaps under-rated.

What we found in Richmond Hill was limited intra-area bonding and less evidence of inter-area bridging to connect the area out to other parts of the wider neighbourhood or city. However, there are people who are strongly engaged in local life. Amongst these are some highly able, determined, vocal and effective local leaders with resources of intelligence, mutual support and determination to

see a better future for themselves and the area. They have not been intimidated into leaving the neighbourhood and have been able to set up groups, keep things going and/or bring about change.

After interviewing all the main community leaders and lead public sector officers working in the area, we drew up a sociogram of the existing networks (see Figure 4) which reveals links between the active people and two strong networks of dedicated and proactive women, though we later found that there is strong negativity expressed by one of these groups and various antagonisms between this group and other residents/stakeholders. One particularly strong network type remains the religious gatherings within Richmond Hill (with or without formal premises), which show the potential for motivating people to come together. Interestingly, the recently arrived evangelical churches have large congregations but most members are not local residents and originate outside the UK. Such strong, faith-based gatherings point up the relative weakness of ties within the existing local population.

From the 'portrait of a street' interviews, we found vestiges of a long-term community where elderly residents reported that they used to know everyone, but friends have moved away or died and have been replaced with households with whom they have less in common. Neighbours do not necessarily know names, even though they greet each other regularly, but several households used the term 'we keep ourselves to ourselves'. They know the names of a few neighbours and where to get help if help is needed, but they do not spend time socialising. Some people are too busy with family and work to involve themselves with neighbours or community activities, but few of those with more time to spare are actively involved in 'community-building' activities and few had heard of local activists and organisations.

Most networks are fragmented, largely isolated and limited to small sub-areas. This is often at a street or extended family group

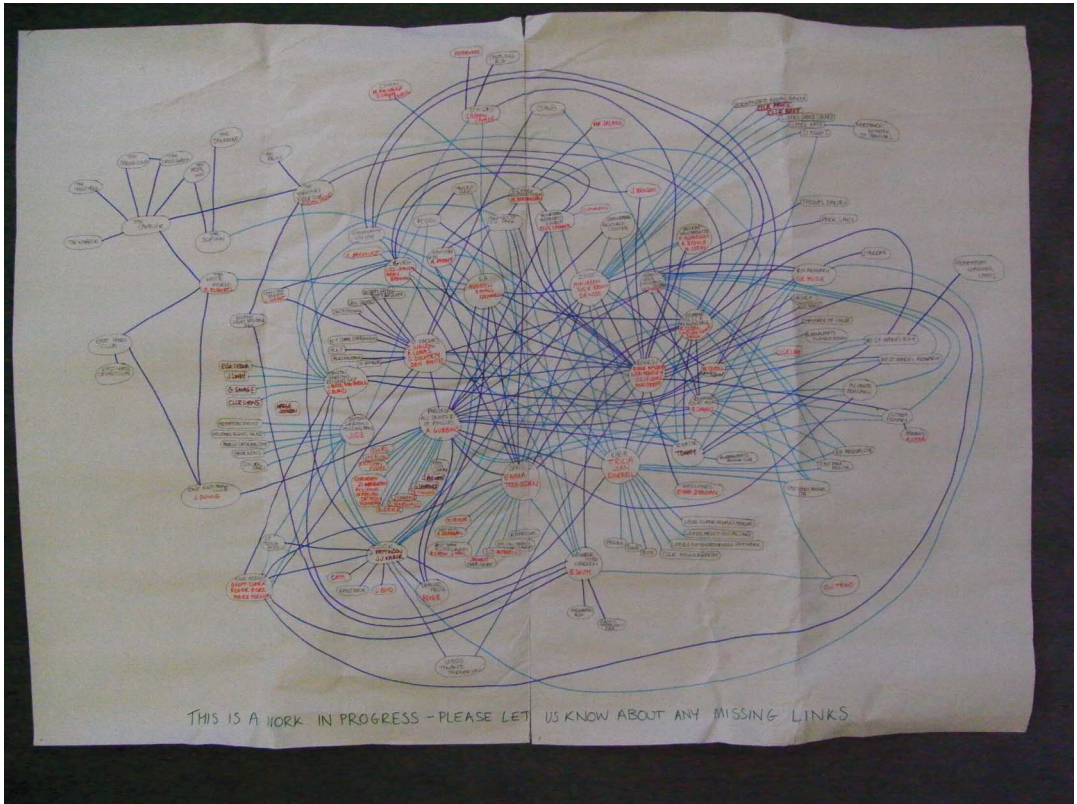


Figure 4 Sociogram of connections in Richmond Hill: the individual names (illegible at this scale) matter less than the evidence of this novel gathering together of information on (multiple) connections between main actors. *Source:* authors.

level or amongst particular interest or ethnic groups. Given the recent influx of more vulnerable asylum seekers and refugees, mainly from Africa, the lack of support networks for these groups is a considerable concern. New residents in the peripheral private sector blocks are not integrated into the locality and long-term unemployed are also little involved in community networks. There are, however, recognised informal networks (and their associated skills) related to black market activities and drugs which we did not explore.

Networks are often vulnerable to failure for lack of resources, volunteers, leadership or consensus. Residents tend not to have appointment diaries, making it hard for organisers to line up attendance substantially in advance. Highly localised, day-to-day prob-

lems take up residents' energies and there has been less active attention to building and enacting a wider strategic vision for the area. Coordination, continuity and support are still very much needed and some very recent trends seem to be moving in the wrong direction. The small number of professionals dedicated to the neighbourhood struggle valiantly on tiny budgets and have to contend with re-organisation and spending cuts. The youth worker, the locally-based community warden and a regeneration agency officer were cut during the time the research was carried out and the elderly action group is insecure. As the area goes through further change, some of which is geared towards servicing the city centre economy and housing market, there is a risk that there will be continued growth of mini

3. Realising potential: under-utilised assets

It is too easy to write off areas with high concentrations of deprivation as having problems and lacking positive qualities, but we have found that with innovative leverage of what is already there, much more potential could be drawn out of the area. This under-utilised potential can be seen across skills, social networks and land assets.

In terms of recognising the skills potential of an area it is important to differentiate between life skills and livelihood skills. The first refer to a large group of psycho-social and interpersonal skills which can help people make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and develop coping and self-management skills that may help them lead a healthy and productive life. Life skills may be directed toward personal actions and actions toward others, as well as actions to change the surrounding environment to make it conducive to health. The latter refer to capabilities, resources and opportunities to pursue individual and household economic goals. Livelihood skills relate to income generation and may include technical/vocational skills (carpentry, sewing, computer programming), job seeking skills such as interviewing, business management skills, entrepreneurial skills and skills to manage money. The crucial point for increasing community well-being and resilience is finding ways to promote both types, building on what is already there and focusing on the kinds of capacities that the community will need in order to deal with future challenges.

While many people have skills, there are two major problems of mis-match: formal skills that are developed are not always the ones that are needed (Horton and Gregory, 2009) and both formal and informal skills could be better used for the benefit of local people (Mulgan, 2008; Lownsbrough *et al.*, 2009). ‘SkillCity’, a research project undertaken in Rotterdam, addressed the latter issues stating the need to preserve and promote non-standard or under-recognised skills in terms of their necessity in a post-carbon economy

but also for their social value. The project’s director, Henk Oosterling, argues that ‘being skilled is per se not an individual, but a collective and concrete practice. The invested creativity does not refer to an autonomous individual, but is always already “interested”, i.e. embedded in social, cultural and economic networks’ (Rotterdam Skillcity website). Furthermore, by focusing on skills, ‘wills’ are produced—the will to be socially engaged, to connect to others, to take an interest in one’s immediate environment. The UK skills development agenda is focused on competing in a global economy (Department for Education and Skills, 2006; HM Treasury, 2006; Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2009) with associated formal qualifications (such as GNVQs, HNDs) and on improving professional skills (ODPM, 2004), all relating to mainstream employment, business start-ups and development. The new Local Enterprise Partnerships will further emphasise this focus (Communities and Local Government, 2010). In contrast, SkillCity emphasised a bottom-up approach to understanding skills and their social and environmental value. In the context of tackling dangerous climate change and possible post-petroleum economies, many commentators, including Hopkins in the Transition Towns movement and Heinberg (2005), have talked about the need for a wholesale ‘great re-skilling’. Practical skills such as cooking, growing food, repairing and reusing, composting, caring, as well as making democratic decisions, conflict resolution and mediation, take on renewed importance in attempts to establish a low energy economy. These are skills that are not just related to capacity for generating personal income, and thus the potential perhaps to move away from a deprived area. Some skills can be used to enhance economic activity for the benefit of the whole area and unpaid work has an important role to play in encouraging mutuality, social capital development and active citizenship amongst residents in deprived areas, thus improving their coping capacities and overall quality of life (Williams and Windebank, 2001; Evans *et al.*, 2006). Yet there is no data

on informal activity (Syrett and North, 2008) or on skills beyond those recognised in the formal labour market.

The skills that we are interested in, then, are those that are more everyday, ordinary and routine but nonetheless vital. In our study, we aimed to identify the existing skills that were marginalised, unclassified, unmeasured, under-utilised and unrecognised as a potential starting point for sustainable regeneration. We explored, through street interviews, the skills that were present in the area. We found many and diverse businesses within the area but the majority of these are either very small and/or family-run businesses (Figure 6). There are considerable numbers of fast food outlets and car repair garages which rely upon non-local passing trade. A handful of successful region-wide businesses are located in Richmond Hill, attracted to the relatively low cost of industrial premises. Despite the strong rhetoric in the UK about a high skilled, knowledge-based economy, in reality there will continue to be a demand for relatively low skilled jobs such as cleaners, sales and care assistants, catering and hotel industry employees, car repair yards and security guards (Athey *et al.*, 2007). Richmond Hill is ideally placed to continue to provide employment in such work as well as to extend its role in housing more skilled people who want to be within walking distance of a city centre job.

We also found considerable life skills within the leadership of organisations, a range of manual skills amongst young men, and domestic skills such as childcare, home management and conflict resolution. There is lack of sufficient effective support for nurturing and recognising these, however. We found that local community empowerment initiatives are constantly undermined by closures and cuts of services, short-term initiatives and an overwhelming feeling that local people are powerless to change anything. The lack of recognition of potential as well as lack of nurturing of this potential is summed up by the following statements:

'I would like to run joinery class but where would the money come from for both equipment and the tutor?' (Interview, Youth worker)

'It is difficult to recruit people to Steps to Excellence for Personal Success. People who don't want to work are in a habit and they mix with other workless people. I can see more potential in those people than they can see in themselves.' (Interview, Regeneration officer)

The skills of asylum seekers continue to go unrecognised and unused as legislation prohibits them from working. The professional qualifications of some of these people could be used to support themselves and their families, as well as contributing to the local economy. This is compounded by the fact that the housing system for asylum seekers is precarious and many are removed when their status changes. Any tentative putting down of roots, establishing networks and offering skills is wasted.

In our detailed street-level analysis we found that networks and skills overlap. Current skills could be used within the street, either through voluntary effort or selling services (for example, gardening, maintenance, building and decorating). Some skills could be used more widely: older people with making and repairing skills could pass these on as part of youth activity sessions.

There was constant criticism from local residents of the poor return on investment from recent regeneration efforts. Investment needs to be targeted at enhancing life chances and building capacity for communities to take charge of their own future. There should be a focus on 'upstream' areas such as education, training, youth activities (practical classes, sports, creative activities), public health (teenage pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, obesity) to substitute for spending on 'picking up the pieces' such as providing accommodation for single mothers, criminal justice system expenses, remedial health care. Service delivery needs to be holistic, as suggested in the 'Total Place' pilots (Reeves,



Diverse Economy in Richmond Hill
Photos: Rachel Codling

Figure 6 Richmond Hill's varied economy. *Source:* authors.

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2010). There is much potential for skills to be upgraded, for confidence building to encourage applying for further training or education. Courses need to be at times to suit parents and travel to college sites should ideally be free for those attending courses. This may in the medium term save money, but Syrett and North (2008) admit that it is quite resource-intensive work at first. Organisations such as the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, Groundwork and the Community Development Trust might act as catalysts for such change.

Potential also exists to create a more viable and useful set of commercial and community venues. There is merit in both some locally accessible facilities that are needed daily and also in a critical mass of facilities concentrated at a 'hub', to create a more appealing and effective heart to the community. The most rigorous approach would be to carry out an audit of all available venues and discover which ones are physically and financially most capable of surviving in at least the medium term. A staged plan for decommissioning some venues (thus releasing sites for other uses) while amalgamating functions into more viable settings would be the most logical way forward. Community buy-out of one or more of the local pubs could provide an innovative way to increase facilities and provide independent employment and enterprise opportunities, including social enterprise (Mawson, 2008). The choice is between random decay and failure on the one hand or, on the other, more deliberate attempts to fill in gaps, match services and venues, improve accessibility and promote a greater management by, and employment of, local people.

Overall, one of the main areas of potential is that Richmond Hill lacks the kind of community hub that could help facilitate, cohere and thicken social networks, develop social capital and strengthen community identity. Almost everyone we spoke to pointed out that there is no single venue where everyone feels at home, no place that has a sense of 'being for everyone'. A hub also needs to be a place to allow drop-ins

without simply operating on fixed opening hours, so chance encounters can be facilitated. Open spaces where people can organise activities and meet, without feeling they have to be part of a group, are vital to building a broad ownership for such a hub. The scheduled rebuilding of the Richmond Hill Primary School provides an excellent opportunity to incorporate facilities for community use. An independent community worker based in the hub could add extra focus and support and help lead a strategic vision.

As well as under-utilised potential in venues, there are other elements of the land and building stock of the area that are not fully used. Understanding their current and possible future uses, ownerships and planning status and proposals are essential tasks (CABE, 2008, 2009). Digital maps were generated to categorise all land by usage and to pick out potential for more productive usage, either as better quality open space, as growing space or for development. Our findings show the enormous scope for regeneration presented by under-used or empty buildings and sites and from an under-utilised public realm, especially given the extensiveness of local authority ownership.

Drawing on a permaculture approach allows us to see the physical land and building assets in a new light (Holmgren, 2002; Whitefield, 2004). For example, there are substantial areas of land that could be redeveloped to add new growing space. All south-facing and nearly south-facing roof space could be used for solar water heat energy production. There is scope for more growing in gardens, even small ones. There are a small number of keen gardeners whose skills could be passed on to others. Using a total area of 970,552 m² of unallocated land in the area, on the assumption that 50% of this land is suitable for growing we calculated that this is enough to provide food for 1941 families (Figure 7).² Benefits over and above improved diet would flow from such land transformation, as has been found in projects such as the pioneering one in Middlesbrough (Design of the Time, 2007).

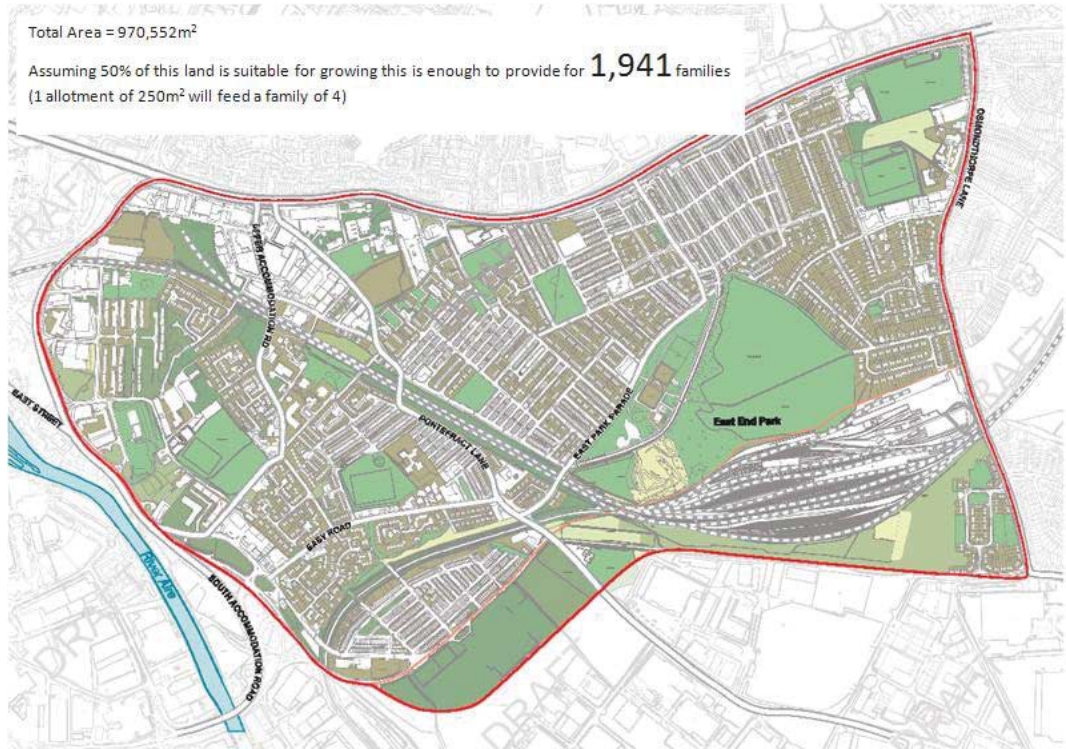


Figure 7 Allotment potential in Richmond Hill. Source: authors.

It is clear that Richmond Hill has a great value to Leeds in terms of its location within the core of the city and in the middle of a strategic corridor between the expanding city centre and the proposed new eco-settlement in the Aire Valley development corridor. This value will continue to grow as climate change mitigation and adaptation strengthen the rationale for a greater intensity of central development and put a premium on land above the floodplain. If left to market forces alone, the area will either continue to be isolated as a deprived area in further decline, thus suppressing economic value of adjacent neighbourhoods, or be gentrified and the existing population displaced by wealthier sectors of the society, so continuing to widen the poverty gap in the city. Already, some apartments of the 'city living' type are encroaching on the neighbourhood. All are gated to avoid the potential risks of interac-

tion with people in the surrounding area, but this militates against integration (Minton, 2009). A regeneration strategy that allows the community to benefit from the strategic value of its location and to contribute to developing strategies for the physical assets and the densification strategies could avoid undesirable alternatives. There is a considerable amount of under-utilised and neglected green land, some of which could be developed, as well as brownfield sites, most of which could be developed. The site of a demolished school offers new opportunities for connection to the lower Aire Valley. However, there are also conflicts emerging in this strategic area. A proposed 'energy from waste' facility is being vociferously rejected by the local community and is acting as a catalyst for local community capacity building and mobilisation (*Yorkshire Evening Post*, 18 June 2010). Here are clear contradictions between the

wider agenda of resource management and the local impacts.

4. *Plugging the leaks: localising resource use and economic activity*

Our final theme relates to the flow of resources out of the area. Any community generates and circulates resources, in the form of money, resources, skills and ideas. The ability of a locality to generate, capture and reuse these is a crucial task for improving well-being and resilience. This includes ways to increase production of food and energy locally, and skilling local people to maintain local infrastructure and services and to trade goods and services. The concept of 'Plugging the Leaks' was created by the New Economics Foundation (2008) to support people in communities to take a different approach to local economic development, one that can have a greater, more sustainable impact on their local economies than traditional regeneration initiatives. The first task is to understand exactly what activities occur, what is being circulated and what is being lost.

'Plugging the Leaks' goes further than simply getting more money into the local economy through tourism, inward investment or funding; it regenerates the local economy from within, taking advantage of the resources already possessed and developing a more sustainable local economy and society with a greater diversity of lower impact goods and services.

The community venues in Richmond Hill do sustain a significant amount of employment. We found 655 employees across these venues. However, only 26% were from the local area, mostly comprising cleaners and cooks. There is substantial scope, then, to localise other kinds of employment opportunities across these venues. Similarly, volunteering, which is an important way to build social networks, is an area of great potential. We found 267 volunteers of whom only half were from the area. There is also scope to increase the management of community

venues by local residents. We found that only 13 out of the 51 venues were managed by local people, most of these being pubs.

Shops and other services have also withdrawn, meaning that people go without or spend beyond the area. There is a strongly felt need for a reliable, affordable and accessible local source of fresh food, yet ways need to be found to make this viable after a recent, much-appreciated initiative to supply fresh food direct from the market at the community centre once a week was unable to continue because it ran at a loss.

The re-establishment of a high street would please many residents. Figure 8 shows the dramatic decline of the local high street from the 1920s to the present day. A new community centre, small supermarket and diverse range of local shops would improve well-being and help to stem the



Figure 8 The decline of the local high street. Source: authors.

outward flow of labour and capital and build on existing capacities.

Conclusions: future directions for regeneration strategies

In summary, we have attempted to point to new directions for urban regeneration policy by focusing on four themes: changing perceptions; making connections; realising potential and plugging resource leaks. So where does this lead us to in terms of future regeneration policy both specifically in Richmond Hill and more generally in the inner-city 'rim'? On one level it takes us into uncharted territory in challenging times. This is both an invigorating and worrying prospect. We want to stress a number of ways to embed new, and not-so-new, directions for urban regeneration. We have pointed out that communities in the rim adjacent to a relatively prosperous city centre contain under-utilised assets that represent huge potential for recasting regeneration policy in new directions. Our work has been partly a plea to recognise this, to help preserve and protect these features and help the local communities realise their potential before, to put it bluntly, someone else does (Wong and Schultz, 2010). The range of localised skills and networks and large tracts of publicly owned land in these areas are significant resources for dealing with the challenges of financial austerity, climate change and energy scarcity. Margins within the City shows that, given more scope to determine their own futures and realise and manage these assets, communities in the rim have real potential to create their own resilience strategies. Existing social networks, skills and physical assets can be consolidated in order that neighbourhoods can adapt to the pressing environmental and economic changes that lie ahead. This is an uncomfortable finding for statutory authorities who are used to command-and-control management structures. But overall control needs to be relinquished in light of the serious shortcomings of regeneration

practice and policy over the last 20 years. It means a move towards 'the equal partnership between professionals and clients—not to consult them or get them on board—but to use their skills to actually deliver services' (Boyle, 2009, p. 10).

So what steps can be taken to develop more effective policy for deprived neighbourhoods?

First, policy needs to be genuinely fine grained and work with what's already there. We have stressed the over-riding need to start from current reality of a community, derived from detailed observation. One project flowing from the initial work is a piece of research being devised with community leaders in Cross Green to help draw out residents' ideas on potential environmental improvements and their willingness to get involved in action to bring about change and maintain improvements.

Second, a greater sense of empowerment is needed so that local people can to lead the regeneration process. Margins within the City recognises the strength in the intrinsic creativity of citizens and in the strength of citizen-driven responses to climate change. The subjective aspect of empowerment relates to a sense of efficacy and is measured by the extent to which people feel that they can influence local or national conditions and decisions. The objective aspect relates to whether people *truly have and use power* and is measured by the extent to which people *actually participate in and influence* their local or national conditions and decisions (Communities and Local Government, 2009, p. 4). In Richmond Hill and other places like it, there is a low level of both senses of empowerment. Community development work is needed to enable networks to strengthen, to give more understanding of the potential for making change happen and to mobilise potential. This all takes time. The Margins team is working on attempting to help access funding to move along elements of this agenda.

There are many ways to do this. The most effective way forward would probably be to

create a strategic community organisation, constituted independently of all the current groups and with an independent chair. A locally produced strategic vision, acceptable to many organisations, would take time to develop but from it could emerge a strong voice and a plan, which would also directly address negative images of the area. Other outputs include community-led advisory panels across rim communities, peer-to-peer learning, creating options catalogues for low carbon urban futures and support for community mapping. The latter can be used to locate and demonstrate the potential of knowledge, skills and their networks, as understood by local residents. It can act as showcasing of creative, problem-solving activities that already exist. Getting residents involved in steering regeneration will embed fine grain improvements and enable co-design of their future (Julier, 2009). Of particular importance here is the removal of barriers that disconnect the neighbourhood from other parts of the city and itself. Given its role in capturing spending and galvanising networks, planning should encourage the redevelopment and reinstatement of a high street as a community hub. It should also encourage the development of the considerable stock of derelict or under-utilised property of low value for social enterprise or forms of collective ownership. This could be backed up through the use of micro-finance, time banks, local currency that further localises the cash economy (North, 2006). The institutional framework to make these elements happen is crucial and models exist such as business and faith forums, town teams and development trusts.

Third, spending needs to move upstream (e.g. enhanced empowerment and skills development) to have downstream impacts (e.g. reduced crime and unemployment), and budget areas need joining up, for example, spending on skills, land, building and social institutions. These have broadly figured amongst UK government aspirations in the past 10 years but are rarely, if ever, achieved. The Margins team is engaging with the City

Council—both senior officers and the locality team—on this and other aspects of the agenda.

Fourth, measures of success need redefining to include much more than standard qualifications, entry into formal employment, level of earnings and formally recognised volunteering. Further action research, which in itself can stimulate enhanced networking, should include monitoring any improvements in social capital and cohesion.

All this points to a need for a broader debate about the next phase of regeneration. Some core attitudinal approaches need to be included here. The first is that policy needs to shift from wastage to a notion of under-utilised resources to facilitate forms of re-imagining potential in a locality. This leads to the second, which involves re-framing a locality as a producer rather than consumer of resources and services. The third involves a process of letting go by statutory authorities. This would mean a commitment to co-creation with local people that truly enacted the aforementioned networked governance and a belief that the present daily reality of any community is the right place to start urban regeneration.

Notes

- 1 The research tools that we used included desk research, visual and interview surveys and mapping. We carried out 30 in-depth interviews with community leaders and professionals and many short interviews with residents. Experimental and creative methods included the work of a photographer and storyteller, developing a 'sociogram' of network connections and the 'Story of a Street' to show micro-level network features and unrealised potential.
- 2 One allotment of 250 m² will feed a family of four.

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