

Connected Communities



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Young People, social capital, community development, inequality, dis-connection.

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Firey, 1945; Rose, 1999; Hill Collins, 2010; Blond, 2009). It permits a confusing ± but ultimately unsatisfying trickerRI¶EDQDOFKHP¶L[LOJEXVIDLOLOJWREOHQG GLVFRQQHFWHGHOHPHOWVKDUPROLRXO\DW]7KLV¶DOFKHP¶VUHIOHFWHGLQ WKHZDWKDWLQ5RVH¶ZRUGVFRPP¶LW\VERWK¶WKHREMHFWDQGWDUJHWIRUWKHH[HUFLVH of political power, whilst remaining, somehow, external to politics and a counterweight to LW¶¶ &RPP¶LW¶HYRNHVHYHUWKLOJZHODFNWREHVHF¶HFRQILGHOWDOG WUXWLOJ3DUDGLVHORVWRUSDUDGLVHVWLOOWREHIR¶G¶WKLVLVGHILQLWHO¶RWDSUDGLVH ZKLFKZH¶NQRZIUFR ¶RZQH[SHULHQFH¶D¶DQ

The historical origins of the concept offer insights; community, as Bauman has noted, speaks to nostalgia ± paradise lost ± as ties of place and localism (community as destiny) fragmented under motors of change, production and mobility. Questions of community, as Abrams (1977) pointed out, are related to questions about cohesion and connection in society (Flint and Robinson, 2008). Hill Collins noted its particular, almost magical, utility - despite its epistemological framing as an apolitical, natural concept ± lies in sustaining social relationships across differences in power and status, securing consent, making social inequalities palatable, and linking individuals to social institutions.

characteristics of those communities, but in wider dynamics of de-industrialisation and general economic decline (Mayo, 1981). By the end of the 1970s the CDPs had been closed down (Loney, 1983).

Issues of community came into sharp focus with the 1981 riots. Lord Scarman (1981), made two recommendations directly concerning community policy. Firstly, that poor (black) communities be brought into local consultation processes regarding policing, secondly, that such communities were resourceful and resilient but needed significant additional resources and investment in jobs and education.

Scarman may have been the last time emphasis was unambiguously placed upon the state to respond to the needs of communities. Increasingly the discourse turned in the direction of self-help but also questioned the capacity of communities to activate networks of mutual support. The Barclay Report (1982) saw successful social work involving the activation of community networks, a proposal criticised from the standpoint of the long term weakening of such networks, echoing Willmott and Young's (1960) earlier research.

By the Bradford riots of 2001 the ball was firmly in the community's court. The problems were perceived by policy makers as a lack of 'community cohesion', (now conceptualised as 'social cohesion') that local communities would become successful at attracting business (Flint and Robinson, 2008). The role of the state, now influenced by neoliberal doctrines (Fletcher, 2008), was restricted to assisting development of cohesion rather than directly investing in employment and resources as Scarman advocated. When **New Labour** came to power, however, firmly embracing many aspects of the neoliberal agenda its approach to community renewal was epitomised in the **New Deal For Communities** programme. Many of the ambitions of the New Deal centered upon children and young people ± their agency in late modernity (Measor and Squires, 2000).

No specific body of work focuses upon children and young people and community issues, a consequence we argue of the development of sub-cultural and deviancy studies (Hall 2006) of community and their rejection of dominant values.

experiences of community as its focus, instead it explored: the significance and mechanics of transition to adulthood or to the world of employment (Bradley and Devadason, 2008; Craine, 1997; MacDonald and Marsh 2005; MacDonald, 2006, 2007; 2008; 2009; 2011; Roberts, 2011; Webster **et al** 2004); or the role of peer groups and impact of gang involvement (Deuchar and Holigan, 2010; Moloney **et al**, 2011; Pitts 2008; Ralphs, Medina and Aldridge, 2009; Young and Hallsworth 2010) and how young people experience crime, disorder, community safety and criminalisation in socio-economically distressed neighbourhoods (Deakin 2006; Deuchar 2010; Goldsmith 2006, 2008; 2011; Green **et al** 2000; Nayak 2003; MacDonald, 2006, 2007, 2011; Matthews

et al 1999; McAuley, 2007; Measor and Squires 2000; Sadler 2008; Stephen and Squires 2003; Squires and Stephen 2005; Turner et al 2006; Yates 2006a, 2006b).

The research tells complex stories about how young people are connected to and disconnected from community; stories challenging dominant discourses that young people erode community and pose a threat to it.

Young people operate forms of agency, resilience and psycho-social attachment which underpin important connections to their close friends, family and extended peer groups. Young people consider themselves to be well connected to their communities (MacDonald et al., 2005; Yates 2006a; McAuley 2007; Shah et al., 2010; Goldsmith 2011). Family and friends are, on the basis of the evidence surveyed, the conduit through which mutual aid is given and organised. Connection to neighbourhood networks is vital for young people. A safe place to stay, food, money, clothes, formal and informal (HPSORRHQWRSSRUWQLWLHVDQGFKLOGFDUHDUDYDLODEOHWRWKHFROQQHFWHG\$RNHU3ODHU and Coleman, 1999; Goldsmith, 2011). For young people living in socially and economically GLVWUHVVGQHLJKERXKRRGVVXKFRQQHFWLROVDUHMWKHRQOXDWRVXJLYH¶ (McAuley 2007: 11).

Connections are neither assured nor stable but formed or reinforced, for example, WKH) vj 60AERGE 6 Erma7040055>5F0486004604411 Tm[0047>3000B5>50046005250051>50B-34(r) 300

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Research sug

allowing individuals and groups to articulate a sense of self, voice their mistrust and mobilize resistance.

Evidence emerged in feedback events, of political resistance, active and lively informal support networks, a profound sense of disappointment with local political processes, criticisms of the stigma and discrimination experienced and challenges to the discRØVHVRIÆURNHQ VRFLHWØQGVRFLDOFDSLWDOGHILFLWÆLWKLOZKLFKPKÆKFROWHPSRUDURPPPØLWÆRYHUODQFHLV steeped.

Three major themes arose from feedback events: [1] the impact of social and economic change on communities; [2] growing inequality and broken promises; [3] the experiences of young people. They represent an overtly political critique of dominant official discourses on community deprivation; indicate complex interplays of informal connections and official disconnections and the ways people cope in adverse circumstances.

The first theme, reflecting the impact of recent social changes focused upon the collapse of youth labour markets and barriers to employment facing young men with limited education and skills. At issue was the implication in official or mainstream political discourse that responsibility for this new precariousness lay primarily with young people themselves.

The third theme: the experiences of young people, was preoccupied with disadvantage and blocked opportunities. Many respondents VKDUHGDSURIRØGVHQVHRØJSHRSOHV issues were overlooked. In the eyes of some respondents, government efforts to address these issues had profound negative consequences for youth and youth

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of young people with their communities and with formal and informal agencies and
institutions within and servicing those communities. We pursued our review of academic
and research literature via critical re-LQWHUSUHWDLRQRIGLVFRXVHVRIFRPPDLWDOG
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consulted research findings which explored the life-worlds of poor communities and
interrogated the connections that individuals in distressed and impoverished
environments established amongst themselves and with the extended state. We
advocated the adoption and development of research methodologies which enhance
investigation of these issues, exploring the nature and consequences of neo-liberalism
whilst contributing to problem-solving and social justice.

The research evidence in the literature provided ample testimony to the complex and
ambiguously connected lives of young people in poor communities and, in feeding our

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Democracy. 6: 65-78 (1999)

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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 of 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 following pages at:

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

