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Leicester City Report

Tomila Lankina

1 Introduction: Neighbourhood Distress as a Topic of Concern¹

1.1 Context of the Emergence of Neighbourhood as a Site for Policy Action

The UK is considered one of the pioneers in neighbourhood interventions in Europe (Smith et al 2007). One important reason for a policy shift towards more local, neighbourhood approaches to governance is the declining faith and interest in traditional local government (Stoker 2004). The size of UK's local government administrative units, which is among the largest in Europe, has been one of the factors hampering citizen's identifications with, and interest in, local government. In the last two decades of the twentieth century, voter turnout in local elections has been steadily declining. Since 1997, the New Labour government has promoted neighbourhood based approaches to 'modernising' local government, aiming to stimulate citizen engagement, empower local councillors, and 'join-up' local service delivery (Lowndes and Sullivan 2008). Neighbourhood approaches have gone hand in hand with a shift to more dispersed forms of governance involving a plethora of actors, both public and private (Sullivan and Skelcher 2001). In the UK, the growth of neighbourhood approaches is associated as much with centralisation as decentralisation, forming part of a process in which functions and authority have been progressively shifted *away* from elected city councils, with the central government (and even the EU) establishing direct relationships with non-elected sub-local bodies and partnerships (see Lowndes and Sullivan 2008 for a comparison with trends elsewhere in Europe and in the US.)

1.2 Neighbourhood Conditions in Case Study City

The city of Leicester provides an excellent laboratory for the analysis of UK neighbourhood interventions. Leicester is typical of UK's many "northern" cities which have experienced industrial decline and related socio-economic problems in the second half of the twentieth century. Leicester is a medium-sized town situated in the East Midlands region with a population of about 280,000. During the Industrial Revolution, Leicester was a prosperous town and was among UK's top industries and trading centres specialising in hosiery and textile production. The 1960s and 1970s saw a rapid decline of industry. While services became an important source of employment, as with other similar cities, there was a general decline in the city's prosperity. Currently, Leicester has smaller than average proportions of its workforce working full-time, part-time or in a self-employed capacity, as well as a higher percentage of unemployed.²

There is a long history of migration from South Asia and Africa to Leicester. In 1991, the population of Indian origin formed the largest single ethnic group in the city, with 22.3

¹ This case study report includes information as per August 2008.

² A large proportion of the inactive group comprises students because there are two large universities in the city. There is a smaller than average number of retirees.

percent (60,300) of the total population. By 2001, this figure had grown to 25.7 percent (72,000). This figure ranks Leicester as having the largest Indian-origin population of any local authority area in England and Wales.³ There are also large numbers of African-Caribbeans, as well as new arrival communities from Africa and the recent EU accession countries such as Poland. The variable spatial clustering, socio-economic profiles, services needs, and cultural values, as well as skills of these communities make the study of neighbourhood interventions in Leicester particularly interesting.

City politics, which reflect the importance of political parties in UK local governance, likewise make Leicester a suitable case for analysis from which UK-wide generalisations could be made. Although the city has a Lord Mayor elected for one year from amongst councillors, his or her role is largely ceremonial. The Leader and Cabinet system ensures that council party politics dominate executive decision making. Leicester city politics is characterised by a very long period of Labour administration (1979-May 2003) in recent years followed by high electoral volatility and party turnover in the council. Currently, out of a total of fifty-four councillors, thirty-eight are Labour, six are Liberal Democrats, eight are Conservatives, and two are Green.⁴

Industrial decline of the last few decades, coupled with the negative effects of the urban planning of the 1950s and 1960s, have led to pockets of extreme deprivation that now dot the city. Political stagnation at the city council level followed by volatility and cabinet instability in recent years has arguably also contributed to policy inadequacies with respect to regeneration. According to government indices of deprivation, several of Leicester's neighbourhoods have acquired the sad distinction of being among the most, or *the* most deprived, in the UK. Consequently, disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Leicester have found themselves the targets of central government regeneration initiatives. Two of these neighbourhoods which have been targets of distinct policy interventions—Braunstone and St. Matthews and St. Marks—form the basis of the Leicester case study.

1.3 Introduction of Case Study Neighbourhoods

Braunstone

Braunstone is a vast, overwhelmingly White British working class council estate, with a population of approximately 14,000 on the south-west edge of the city centre. Most of the housing is still council owned. It is an area of historic significance. Braunstone was mentioned in the Domesday Book and the site of the 13th century St. Peters Church where the prominent Winstanley Family who acquired the estate in 1649, were buried. As late as 1924, a county guide described Braunstone as a “curiously remote and isolated little village, with stately hall of brick, in a pretty park with water,” one with a “quaint, old-world character.”⁵

South Braunstone, located in the east but known as the South, and originally part of the Parish of Braunstone, developed as a settlement of skilled artisans servicing the Winstanley Family estate in the mid to late 19th century. Many of the settlers were of Scottish or Irish origin. Their compact settlement in one area reinforced an identity distinct from the then largely English city. In 1924, this area was purchased and extended as one of Leicester's first council housing areas, with large modern family homes built and home ownership also encouraged. The construction was part of Lloyd George's post WWI agenda of making England a “land fit

³ Source: Leicester City Council website.

⁴ <http://www.leicester.gov.uk/your-council--services/council-and-democracy/local-democracy/political-make-up>

⁵ <http://www.le.ac.uk/emoha/community/resources/braunstone/village.html>

for heroes” in which slums had no place.⁶ The area became flanked by the wide boulevard-like Kingsway Road with a large village green. The area to the north, which boasts one of the city’s largest and most beautiful parks originally owned by the Winstanleys, was annexed by the Leicester City Council in 1935 and became Braunstone Estate. Many residents were settled here as part of the city authorities’ downtown slums clearing schemes. The remaining area originally called the Parish of Braunstone was renamed in 1977 as Braunstone Town. From the 1920s onwards in addition to council homes, it continued to maintain privately built homes.

In the post-World War II decades, the whole of the estate including the south deteriorated and became one of the most deprived and crime-ridden areas in the whole of the UK. The vast majority of its housing had been city council-run, and generations of its residents had been on benefits. In 1999, Braunstone had double the number of recorded crimes compared to similar areas in the East Midlands. Roughly 30 percent of its residents were not working, while the average annual income was £8,480. Almost a third of all households were single parent households. The mortality rates were also among the highest in the UK: according to the UK Standard Mortality Ratio, residents of Braunstone were likely to die younger than those in any other part of the city and county. Coronary heart and lung diseases, strokes and cancers, as well as high infant mortality and illnesses related to extremely high rates of teen pregnancies were among the factors contributing to the grim statistics.⁷

In Leicester, the estate has acquired the image of an unsafe, dilapidated, and even racist neighbourhood shunned by those on the city’s other estates. Within Braunstone itself, the north became known as “dodge city,” shunned by those in the somewhat less deprived south. The legacy of deprivation contributed to the separation—perceived and real—between the city and the estate.

St. Matthews and St. Marks

St. Matthews is situated in the Inner City area, to the immediate north-east of the city centre. It is however cut off from the centre by a dual carriageway and is not adjacent to any other residential areas. The population is 4,000. Historically, it developed as a small factory and slum housing area and the houses were turned into council housing in the 1950s. St. Matthews remains the most deprived neighbourhood in the whole of Leicester. In 2003, over 50 percent of households had an annual income of only £6,239, which is substantially lower than the UK national average of £14,161. St. Marks is separated from St. Matthews by a busy road. It originated as a settlement from demolished slum clearance areas in the 1960s.

The dual title of the estate is indicative of the artificiality of gluing two rather distinct estates into one awkward whole. St. Marks is an established, predominantly Asian (mostly Gujarati) (62 percent) and White British community with the Asians residing on the estate for some thirty years. The demographic here is “greying” with 44 percent aged 65 or over, which contrasts with the Leicester average of 36. The St. Matthews estate is predominantly White British, Black African (17 percent) and Asian with many Somali, West Indian, Portuguese, Russian, Montserratian, Zimbabwean, and Kurdish residents and new arrivals. The population demographic is substantially younger than in St. Marks, which is closer to the Leicester average. Education attainment is also higher in St. Matthews: while as many as 59 percent of St. Marks residents have no qualifications, the statistics are substantially lower for St. Matthews (47 percent). The Leicester average is 38 percent. While adjacent to one another, the two estates are divided by an important road artery, which reinforces the spatial separation

⁶ <http://www.leicester.gov.uk/index.asp?pgid=1811>

⁷ NDC Delivery Plan 2004-2008.

between the distinct communities. As one community worker put it, crossing over the road “feels like going into two different areas of the city: the dress and the way people look are different.”⁸ St. Matthews and St. Marks are also geographically adjacent to another of the city’s main roads, Belgrave Road, also known in local parlance as the Golden Mile for the myriads of Indian gold, jewelry, and sari shops. Although Belgrave is not administratively part of the joint estate, the Asian community in St. Marks naturally gravitates towards it.

2 Policy Interventions in Two Neighbourhoods Chosen

2.1 Overview of the Two Interventions

New Deal for Communities

The New Deal for Communities (NDC), of which Braunstone was beneficiary, was established in the context of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, which was to cover the period of 1999-2010 and targeted areas of extreme deprivation with populations between 5,000 and 24,000 residents (see Lowndes and Sullivan 2008, Smith et al 2007). Thirty-nine areas were selected and a funding of as much as 8.2 million Euros per neighbourhood per year was allocated. Key NDC goals were to reduce polarisation between the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods and other areas, improve housing and the physical environment, target access to employment and education, and improve health and community safety. Although the central government initiated and funded the NDC, it was to be implemented through local strategic partnerships with an important resident involvement component (Atkinson and Carmichael 2007). The position of elected local authorities, however, remained ambiguous (as in previous rounds of centrally funded regeneration initiatives under the Conservatives), with city politics seemingly overridden by national policy priorities backed by major investment. Neighbourhoods were invited to bid for a large pot of money allocated for a period up to ten years based on the severity of deprivation. The Braunstone estate in Leicester succeeded in winning NDC funding in 1999.

Neighbourhood Management

Leicester’s other neighbourhoods became targets for alternative forms of intervention, such as Neighbourhood Management (NM) which was being implemented in St. Matthews and St. Marks. Not only did these interventions receive considerably less funding than NDC, but they also varied in terms of their goals, institutional arrangements and procedures. The UK government identified twenty areas clustered in seven priority neighbourhoods consisting of the so-called Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) with a population of roughly 1,500 each that had fallen into the bottom 5 percent of the 2004 national Index of Deprivation. Indicators such as crime rates, employment, education, housing, and the environment had been used in compiling the index. St. Matthews and St. Marks were among the five of the seven neighbourhoods in Leicester in which the NM model was set up.⁹ The NM initiative took effect in September 2006.

The government’s Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU), now part of the Department of Communities and Local Government, launched the Neighbourhood Management (NM) Pathfinder Programme in 2001.¹⁰ Although similar in spirit to some earlier interventions, NM was a relatively new approach, which aimed to improve public services, build community

⁸ Personal interview, Respondent No. 17, 6 February 2008.

⁹ *Neighbourhood Management: Spring 2007 Briefing*.

¹⁰ In the first round 20 deprived neighbourhoods were selected in England for testing out the new NM model. In 2004, a further 15 Pathfinders were established in a second round of funding (Neighbourhood Management: An Overview of the 2004 and 2007 Round 2 Pathfinder Household Surveys: Key Findings 2007).

capacity, and promote socioeconomic renewal. The policy goal of the model was to bring together the local community and local service providers through a partnership. The partnership would be led by a dedicated Neighbourhood Manager and supported by an equally dedicated neighbourhood team.¹¹ Rather than investing in the development of entirely new facilities and delivery mechanisms (as in NDC), the emphasis here was on increasing coordination among existing service providers (e.g. in housing, urban planning, health, education) which did not all fall under the auspices of the elected local authority. By coordinating on a very local basis, and developing community engagement alongside, the aim was to improve not just the efficiency but also the quality of local services, as understanding of the scope for synergies, innovation and citizen responsiveness would be increased. If NDC was about creating and ushering in new structures and resources (a ‘clean sheet’ approach), NM was then about bending existing structures and resources. The Neighbourhood Manager would be the catalyst and broker for the ‘mainstreaming’ of a neighbourhood approach to partnership and community engagement.

In 2005, there were nearly 200 neighbourhood management partnerships UK-wide, with thirty-five funded NM pathfinders.¹² Areas subject to NM are eligible for up to £200,000 in the first year for the recruitment of key staff, establishment of partnerships and operational systems, as well as the development of a delivery plan. Once they become operational, these areas are eligible to receive on average £350,000 per year over a period of seven years. By the end of the fifth year of operation however, the government target would be that most of the running programmes supported by initial funding would become sustainable and improvements in services delivery would be attained through continued negotiation among service providers, consultation on resident priorities, and analysis of neighbourhood statistics.¹³

The key focus of NM is on improving public services, community capacity building, and renewal in a way that would “marry[ing] ‘top down’ processes to ‘bottom up’ needs and priorities.”¹⁴ Within the framework of this intervention substantially less funding is allocated compared to NDC. In 2007/08 for example, the NM budget was £140,000.¹⁵ Neighbourhood Management is however aimed at much greater sustainability as limited resources are put into the hands of the local residents, who decide on the types and nature of services that are best for the community.¹⁶ Key organisations and partnerships at the city level are to work in a coordinated fashion to address issues in a holistic way.

¹¹ (Neighbourhood Management: An Overview of the 2004 and 2007 Round 2 Pathfinder Household Surveys: Key Findings 2007)

¹² *Neighbourhood Management – Working Together to Create Cleaner Safer Greener Communities: A Collection of Case Studies*, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, March 2005.

¹³ <http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk/page.asp?id=581>

¹⁴ *St. Matthews and St. Marks Neighbourhood Delivery Plan*, June 2007 (Leicester: Leicester Neighbourhood Management), p. 6.

¹⁵ *St. Matthews and St. Marks Neighbourhood Delivery Plan*, June 2007 (Leicester: Leicester Neighbourhood Management), p. 7.

¹⁶ In addition, low-cost awareness- and community-building initiatives have been undertaken such as clean-up days, resident “patch walks” or grow your own fruit and vegetable campaigns. In Braunstone now too, it is recognised as “the way to go” and a promising initiative that would ensure the sustainability of NDC that is now ending. Personal interview, Respondent No. 1, 14 January 2008.

3 Explaining and Interpreting Neighbourhood Intervention

3.1 Braunstone

Institutional Factors

When Braunstone was awarded NDC money in July 2000, the non-for profit renewal company, Braunstone Community Association (BCA) was set up to manage and deliver NDC.¹⁷ With members overwhelmingly composed of Braunstone residents, it was to target the key priority areas of crime and community safety; employability and enterprise; health and wellbeing; housing and environment; education and family learning; community development and youth inclusion.¹⁸ A board was set up including nine Resident Directors, four Strategic Partner Directors, two Voluntary Sector Directors, and two Associate Directors. The nine Resident Directors were to be popularly elected. Each year three Directors, one from each of the areas they represent, were to stand down but could offer themselves for re-election.¹⁹

Among thirty-nine neighbourhoods UK-wide, Braunstone became the only estate that managed to keep the local authority formally at arms length, opting for accountability to other bodies. This choice reflected the history of pervasive council involvement on the estate on the one hand and its paradoxical sense of separateness from the city on the other. “They ruled your life”²⁰ is a statement one hears as often on the estate as the complaint that Braunstone had been “neglected” for decades. While a substantial share of council dwellers were beneficiaries of council services and resources—ranging from housing, to single parent and unemployment benefits—there was also a perception that many city initiatives bypassed Braunstone (Wright). Furthermore, as one Braunstone actor put it, “There was a feeling that statutory agencies were the ones who created all the problems so it was felt it would not be good to entrust them again with NDC.”²¹ “The culture was that the city council is the problem here,” reported another actor with experience of work in Braunstone.²²

Regeneration initiatives prior to NDC suffered from the perception that “people from above” were “parachuted” into the community with no prior consultation or awareness of its actual needs. Local community workers maintained that it was therefore paramount to ensure that any new regeneration bodies would be staffed by the local people.²³

¹⁷ It now has over 340 members. There are also 4 Strategic Partner Directors, 2 Voluntary Sector Directors, and 2 Associate Directors. NDC Delivery Plan 2004-2008. According to Angie Wright, there are now 9 directors

¹⁸ Stated Aims and targets: “By 2008, our aim and targets are to ensure that: Overall crime in Braunstone is reduced by 10%; 75% of residents feel safe in the community; 20% of working age residents have some form of training qualification; Unemployment is within 2% of the city average, and there is a 50% increase in Small, Medium Enterprises (SME's) operating in Braunstone; 25% of Braunstone residents are involved in health prevention and improvement programmes; There is a 50% increase in residents that get involved in physical activity; 75% of homes in Braunstone meet Decent Homes Standards; public open spaces are improved and managed in a way that can be sustained in the future; The educational attainment of pupils at all key stages has made significant progress towards the city average; There is a significant increase in the number of people engaged in lifelong learning opportunities and acquiring formal qualifications; a third of Braunstone residents are engaged in community groups; 50% of young people are engaged in personal and social development activities.” <http://82.109.194.144/fmi/xsl/dta/profile.xml?&-recid=12836>

¹⁹ The Strategic Partner Directors currently represent Leicester City Council, Leicester City West Primary Care Trust, Leicester Shire Connexions Service and the local Learning & Skills Council. The Voluntary Sector Directors are nominated by the local Voluntary Sector Forum <http://82.109.194.144/fmi/xsl/dta/profile.xml?&-recid=12836> (development Trusts Association Website).

²⁰ Personal interview, Respondent No. 3, 3 March 2008.

²¹ Personal interview, Respondent No 7, 6 March 2008.

²² Personal interview, Respondent No. 27, 4 March 2008.

²³ Personal interview, Respondent No 7, 6 March 2008.

The Government Office required NDC beneficiaries to work with a key “accountable body,” usually the local authorities. However, BCA opted to work with the Leicester Housing Association instead. Much of the misunderstanding came about from the government’s own rhetoric that NDC would be “resident-led” which was interpreted locally as a lack of any accountability to the statutory authorities.²⁴ Many respondents recalled how during the early stages of NDC the local authority itself got frustrated with Braunstone’s constant suspicions of any attempts at the local authority’s involvement in the operation of NDC: “You think we are rubbish, so do things on your own,” was the LCC’s reported response.²⁵

The LCC then became a passive bystander as BCA descended into factionalism and squabbles involving allegations of corruption, wheeler-dealer affairs, and financial mismanagement. According to a senior executive of BCA at the time, “There was a gulf between the city and Braunstone and the local authority was so fed up that they were glad to go away.”²⁶ The local authorities’ separation from NDC management exacerbated the built-in inadequacies and poor design of NDC itself. Those involved with NDC at the time claimed that what the government tried to drum up as a “flagship” initiative turned into a series of implementation nightmares.²⁷ In an estate where generations lived well below the poverty line and had no experience with financial management, had low managerial skills, and poor self-confidence, the residents were now to manage nearly fifty million pounds of NDC funds. Virtually no specialised training was provided, while the few training sessions were largely “tokenistic” and “quick outputs”-oriented.²⁸ According to a private consultant that the government hired in 2000-2001 to do NDC-related training, “It was typical of the whole process: the request came in March to do the training and was to be done by May 1st and it involved everything—from how to hold a meeting to hiring and budgeting and covered lots of areas.”²⁹ The leader of a women’s organisation in Braunstone involved with the intervention also said, “At the start of NDC, because of all the unrealistic targets set, the whole process was a bit too much too quickly.”³⁰ A lack of experience with managing money also generated distorted or unrealistic expectations.

The fact that the city authorities had been distanced from the start ensured that NDC would differ from previous initiatives in that there would be more genuine local empowerment in designing neighbourhood interventions. Within three years, a new board was set up, which helped do away with factionalism, and resident experience with managing the estate began to pay off, generating confidence for greater involvement. Government plans to scrap NDC in Braunstone were set aside and NDC was to carry on for a total of ten years. The lack of the local authorities’ stifling bureaucratic intervention also ensured a degree of experimentation in policy design.

Flexibility is cited among the key reasons for success of bottom-up interventions compared to those of the statutory authorities. One youth worker maintained: “statutory authorities are different. . . but as a voluntary organisation we could be quite creative in how we deliver things [as] statutory restrictions are not there.”³¹ Another youth worker lamented: “I find it disappointing that the city council youth services are constantly undergoing one review or another and are constantly being restructured due to political or other reasons or lack of

²⁴ Personal interview, Respondent No. 27, 4 March 2008.

²⁵ Personal interview, Respondent No. 27, 4 March 2008.

²⁶ Personal interview, Respondent No. 13, 20 March 2008.

²⁷ Personal interview, Respondent No. 27, 4 March 2008.

²⁸ Personal interviews; NDC Delivery Plan 2004-2008.

²⁹ Personal interview, Respondent No. 27, 4 March 2008.

³⁰ Personal interview, Respondent No. 10, 13 February 2008.

³¹ Personal interview, Respondent No. 6, 28 February 2008.

funding. What the BCA could do as an agency independent of the local authority is to be allowed to take risks and be innovative... Sometimes a bureaucratic authority like a local authority stifles innovation—it is not in their nature to take risks.” Echoing him, another community worker stated: “bureaucracies don’t like risks, but development workers do as life is risky.” According to him, NDC’s key advantage was its flexibility as “fuzzy is good.” “No one tells us what to do . . . no-one checks whether we are towing the party line or not,” he maintained.³² According to one respondent, a small neighbourhood tenants association strove to be recognised by the local authority only to find itself bombarded with tons of “paperwork” and “city council jargon” with the staff backing out in horror refusing to work in the statutory authority’s format.³³

Political Factors

Although the Leicester city authorities took a largely hands off approach to NDC implementation in Braunstone, city politics shaped the perceptions and form of regeneration there in important ways. A variety of regeneration initiatives had been undertaken prior to NDC. As with other government interventions, they were short-run by design, usually spanning about three years. The choice of the specific policy intervention and its continuity became hostage to the shifting political constellations of the Leicester City Council. Community workers in Braunstone complained of how a Labour-dominated council would opt for one type of intervention, which would then be scrapped following the victory of the Liberal Democrats. Policy associated with the previous ruling party would be “poo poed” and previous initiatives scrapped, all within a matter of two to three years. As one local actor maintained, “the council used to be Tory/Liberal and didn’t support BCA as it was Labour initiated. They even didn’t want to be seen supporting that initiative and were distancing themselves from it to show that they’re not Labour. They never turned up at a board meeting for that reason too.”³⁴

A major project undertaken in the context of regeneration, the building of a Leisure Centre, had been temporarily frozen. It was salvaged only because of a statutory loophole whereby a project could not be stopped if planning permission had been already obtained. City activists maintained the real reason for the obstruction of work on building the Centre was politics and the Liberal Democrats’ opposition to this Labour-supported project.³⁵ Roger Blackmore, council leader at the time was alleged to have said: “If I got in earlier, I would have stopped it.” Yet “when it turned out to be a success these same opponents made public statements about how they “saved the Leisure Centre,” one local activist mused.³⁶ As one city actor put it with regard to urban regeneration in Leicester: “It is very political and it is rubbish politics.”³⁷

³² Personal interview, Respondent No. 9, 6 March 2008.

³³ Personal interview, Respondent No. 3, 3 March 2008.

³⁴ Personal interview, Respondent No. 12, 11 February 2008.

³⁵ Personal interview, Respondent No. 8, 11 February 2008.

³⁶ Personal interview, Respondent No. 12, 11 February 2008.

³⁷ Personal interview, Respondent No. 27, 4 March 2008. The most recent initiatives reproduce this trend, said one community worker, who had also worked in the Leicester city government for 14 years: “There are 9 area committees in the city now with 3 wards each. . . It works like a big surgery: people come along looking for handouts. The Labour administration came in and said these area committees are rubbish so we are now talking about taking it down to ward level and we are talking about ward committees but that confuses people. I don’t think they have a great strategy about it. . . Some neighbourhoods border 2 or 3 wards and it becomes problematic if they are not in the same party or even in one party there are various camps and they have to sit in on meetings with each other. Some neighbourhoods fit within a ward but it only covers a small part of the ward.” Personal interview, Respondent No. 1, 14 January 2008.

These distinct and rapidly succeeding initiatives were highly disruptive and were hardly conducive to the kind of consistent and sustained long-term regeneration work that was required on the estate after years of decay. They contributed to local residents' mistrust of the city and their weak identification with the elected local authorities. "The politics was behind government decisions but actually it should be what works best for the area, and not what party supports it," complained one interviewee.³⁸ One city level executive actor confided and shared her embarrassment at having to go out into the community and present yet another city policy initiative in view of the already high levels of mistrust and skepticism: "I fear that next time I go to these communities I will have lost all credibility when I try to bring another policy."³⁹

By this time however, NDC had been in place for nearly ten years and a shift in the neighbourhood-city dynamics was taking shape. Rather than contributing to the 'us and them' cleavage, these failed initiatives encouraged greater resident involvement at both the community and city levels. Despite the complications of the early years, NDC provided a push for confidence building and empowerment first at a community and then at the city level. The resident-led board provided such a platform, but also myriads of other forums and voluntary sector activities funded through NDC.

When city council elections were held in 2007, all three councillors elected from the estate had been resident directors on the board. While Councillor Michael Cook had had prior managerial and political experience, and Wayne Naylor had been active in the voluntary sector for a number of years, the outspoken Anne Glover exemplified community empowerment in a sense much more genuine than any of the government public relations glossy brochures could have hoped for. A woman "born and bred on the estate", she had been on benefits for many years and had little formal education. "Then NDC came about and it allowed people like me to take control of their destiny" and "I grabbed the opportunity," she stated. According to Glover, getting elected to the city council was a way to "get more things done" and to "change the perception of the neighbourhood at city level."⁴⁰ Numerous other local actors interviewed for the project confirmed this narrative of empowerment and how the election of the three board directors helped break down the barriers separating the city authorities from the estate. As one local actor put it, now that the city council has Glover, Naylor, and Cook, "we have started to influence things from the top down".⁴¹ Perceptions of city politics too changed with this shift: while previously a provision existed that councillors could not sit on the resident-led Board of Directors so as "to keep politics out of the board", the BCA allowed a change to the rules following the 2007 Leicester city council elections.⁴²

Civic/Legacies Factors

Decades of ignorance regarding Braunstone at the city level bred an image of a hostile, welfare-dependent, and passive estate, and yet within Braunstone itself, community activism has been traditionally very strong. This legacy should be taken into account when discussing

³⁸ Personal interview, Respondent No. 12, 11 February 2008.

³⁹ Personal interview, Respondent No. 26, 7 November 2007.

And an actor in the regional office of the national government maintained with regard to another intervention, NM: "Politics has a big impact—it impacted in the NM approach in particular as after the 2007 elections the new administration in Leicester had taken a lot of persuading to take the NM approach up and continue working on it. The reluctance was because they saw it as the previous administration's baby. [Who was doing the persuading?] Our office in particular but also others at a local level had to do a lot of persuading on the merits of the NM approach". Personal interview, Respondent No. 28, 3 March 2008.

⁴⁰ Personal interview, 11 February 2008.

⁴¹ Personal interview, Respondent No. 7, 6 March 2008.

⁴² Personal interview, Respondent No. 12, 11 February 2008.

the nature and course of the government regeneration interventions. The image of a council estate dependent on public handouts obscured the fact that Braunstone has “thrived on voluntary work”: clubs, societies, and self-help initiatives have always been around in Braunstone.⁴³

Community identifications fostered a sense of pride in the neighbourhood—“the residents have been always passionate about their area”⁴⁴—one that city level actors would be hard pressed to understand given the perceived and real decay and deprivation on the estate. This factor might explain why the Community Development and Inclusion with its stress on “ownership” of the regeneration programme became an important element of the NDC agenda.⁴⁵ This legacy of community activism helps explain why after an initial phase of mistrust of NDC, it took off so successfully. The Carnival and the Braunstone Bonfire, officially supported within the context of NDC in order to “raise civic pride and community spirit”⁴⁶ were actually rooted in the unique local traditions. Their authenticity therefore encouraged local residents to embrace these events.

This legacy also explains why empowerment and self-help became narratives so readily capitalised upon by the local residents. While the government trumpeted such tangible and measurable outputs of the intervention as an alleged reduction of child mortality, one activist however put it, “the real story to be told is how well they were able to engage with the citizens and not how they could tick a box. This is a key message but I fear it is not high enough up the ladder. It is easier to show a building or a bus than to say that we have achieved a huge amount of community engagement as they can’t really show it [measure it].”⁴⁷

A number of interviewees also commented on the strength of the community spirit as compared to other neighbourhoods where they had been previously involved in regeneration. One community worker contrasted Braunstone with the divisiveness that existed in other areas: “If some group got money to work on something, the other would say how come we did not get it. There was no community spirit. If a project did not benefit their narrow area they were upset. . . The feeling here is that as long as it benefits the neighbourhood as a whole it is good.”⁴⁸

Several respondents used the concept of “social capital” to describe the nature of the local community and explained the relative success of NDC. The concept of social capital was popularised by the UK government from around 2000 (Halpern 2005, Lowndes and Wilson 2001). A Neighbourhood Support Team community worker summarised the reasons behind community receptivity of this concept, which contrasted with other government initiatives which are perceived to be artificial: “Social capital . . . is not something you bring from above but something that *already exists in a community* (emphasis added). You can help in building it though.”⁴⁹

⁴³ Personal interview, Respondent No. 3, 3 March 2008.

⁴⁴ Personal interview, Respondent No. 3, 3 March 2008.

⁴⁵ NDC Delivery Plan 2004-2008.

⁴⁶ NDC Delivery Plan 2004-2008.

⁴⁷ Personal interview, Respondent No. 9, 6 March 2008.

⁴⁸ Personal interview, Respondent No. 5, 25 February 2008.

⁴⁹ Personal interview, Respondent No. 9, 6 March 2008. At the same time some respondents speculated that voluntary activism characteristic of a council estate might wane as people become home owners and acquire stable employment. Personal interview, Respondent No. 3, 3 March 2008.

Socio-Demographic Factors

The socio-demographic makeup of the community should be also considered an important factor in the analysis of the neighbourhood intervention. Generations of people have lived on the estate, often on the same street, fostering a strong sense of community identification with Braunstone. A parish audit of the St. Peters Church revealed strong inter-generational continuity in the residential makeup⁵⁰ in Braunstone. This “old style Coronation Street community” identity transcended race, religion or ethnicity. Respondents argued that an African-Caribbean family counting three generations on the estate would be regarded more authentically Braunstone than a white British one with only one or two generations.

This stable socio-demographic makeup precluded inter-neighbourhood mobility thereby possibly contributing to local residents’ interest in regeneration.

Spatial/ Infrastructure/ Anchoring Factors

An important reason for success in regenerating the neighbourhood relates to spatial factors. As a vast estate with substantial open spaces, it provided room for architectural planning and construction of facilities that would change the nature of recreational and other infrastructure and external image and self-perceptions of the neighbourhood.

Cityscape planning contributed to the bridging of the North-South divide within Braunstone. In order to “take the negative tag off”, North Braunstone was renamed Braunstone Park, while the park itself was cleaned up to become the “jewel in the crown” in the centre of the estate.⁵¹ This contrasted with the image of the park and surrounding areas of the past as full of burnt out cars, garbage, and litter.

3.2 St. Matthews and St. Marks

Institutional Factors

The main difference with previous interventions in the neighbourhood is that the NM board became the key contact and coordination body through which residents would seek to influence the local authorities and other delivery agencies. The board had been set up following resident elections in both St Matthews and St Marks in 2007. A neighbourhood manager was appointed to oversee the popularly elected resident board. The Board comprised five councillors for the wards of Latimer and Spinney Hills; six residents elected from the St Matthews and St Marks housing estate each (a total of twelve); and representatives from agencies: the police; Taylor Road school; Sure Start St Matthews; Primary Care Trust; Councils Youth Service; Job Centre Plus; Councils Housing Department; and Tenants Association. The board was to meet monthly and meetings were to be held in both areas.

The board was to include a number of working groups (also called theme groups) carrying much of the work of Neighbourhood Management, such as organising a cleanup day or setting up a job fair. These groups were made up of agencies such as Housing, Sure Start and residents. According the NM Delivery plan, “It is hoped these could eventually be organisations in their own right, be resident led, constituted and capable of raising money and running services on the Estates. A very important part of neighbourhood management is to engage as many residents as possible in the decision-making processes.”⁵² The key issues identified in the 2007 Delivery Plan were crime and community safety; health; education;

⁵⁰ Personal interview, Respondent No. 3, 3 March 2008.

⁵¹ Personal interview, Respondent No. 1, 14 January 2008.

⁵² *St. Matthews and St. Marks Neighbourhood Delivery Plan*, June 2007 (Leicester: Leicester Neighbourhood Management), p. 12.

housing, environment and transport; income and employment; community involvement; and young people.⁵³

When the board was being set up, in addition to ensuring that an equal number of people were elected from each of the two estates (six), careful consideration was given to representation of the major ethnic and communal groups on the two estates. This was to prevent allegations of favoritism and over-representation of some minorities. While that was not the officially declared goal, respondents from the board maintained that combining the two estates together and making their residents sit on one board was also aimed at ensuring that St. Marks would participate and benefit from regeneration initiatives.

Generally, interviewees expressed support for a neighbourhood approach and juxtaposed it to the more “top down” city-led interventions. As with Braunstone, the local authority is a target of much criticism when contrasted with the more flexible “bottom-up” neighbourhood interventions, albeit on a much smaller scale. According to a community worker from St. Marks, “There are barriers between the city level and the community. . . The city authorities will always want to work in little boxes. Or say we will do it this way but actually they don’t as they have limits: oh, we can’t do this or that.”⁵⁴

This bureaucratic factor, which had been highlighted in Braunstone, acquires particular salience with the new arrivals community as they are not familiar with the local institutions, rules and regulations and have to learn all the ropes from scratch. An example is setting up local leisure or cultural facilities as illustrated by an activist from a Somali cultural centre: “We have been struggling [to] theoretically and practically develop a knowledge base. You need this in this country where you are asked lots of questions like health and safety regulations. Our communities don’t know this as we come from a completely different country and culture.”⁵⁵ Says another local actor: “Language could be the most oppressive tool as when educated people meet with others like the educated white middle class and speak a language they don’t understand or when they are not so educated and when a long report is produced that people can’t understand.”⁵⁶ There is also a perception that the local authority skillfully uses community divisions and their collective action problems to mask its own inaction.⁵⁷

At the same time, although the NM board is supposed to serve as the main liaising forum between the community and the city authorities, there appears to be little overall interest in its operation, although the new arrivals from St. Matthews are more engaged than the more established communities of St. Marks. The Neighbourhood Manager maintained that the original enthusiasm in taking part in the board elections the first time around would be hard to sustain as people were quick to realise that there is little money involved in this intervention. The result is often frustration even among board members as to the “little things” they have to deal with and squabble over, such as the positioning of a rubbish bin on the estate—an issue that generated disagreements and took a long time to resolve. The meager budget allocated within NM is not matched by the voluminous reporting requirements of the NM manager and board members, such as twenty page quarterly reports, which is likewise a source of frustration. Interviews with community workers revealed a low awareness of the NM board, its goals, and membership. For some, it is just “yet another layer of decision making” even

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Personal interview, Respondent No. 16, 28 March 2008.

⁵⁵ Personal interview, Respondent No. 14, 6 March 2008.

⁵⁶ Personal interview, Respondent No. 23, 27 February 2008.

⁵⁷ Personal interview, Respondent No. 14, 6 March 2008.

though “on paper it looks good.”⁵⁸ They lamented the amount of empty talk and consultation fatigue but with no real and tangible outputs: “You meet, you talk a lot, and that’s it, nothing happens afterwards. There are also no resources.”⁵⁹ There are also suspicions that it is another bureaucratic instrument of the local authority that serves its own purposes.

The local authority has also been accused of showing favouritism to some groups and not others, particularly in resource allocation. What reinforced the perception of discrepancy in resources allocation is that families with children get priority in housing allocation compared to single or childless households, which is more likely to be the case in the ageing St. Marks neighbourhood. This factor contributed to the perception that St. Matthews was already getting more than St. Marks, and this in turn doomed the half-baked attempt to generate a common neighbourhood and structure within the latest NM intervention. Less than two years that the board had been in operation, St. Marks decided to set up its own board. While there would be the same manager for the two estates, two sub-managers representing St. Matthews and St. Marks, respectively, would work under him.⁶⁰

Political Factors

Because of the distinct nature of the social and ethnic make-up of the St. Matthews and St. Marks estates, and the variable nature of involvement at the neighbourhood level, perceptions of the city council and its political influence also varied. The two communities—the Asians in St. Marks and the Somalis in St. Matthews—illustrate these differences. The Asians form the majority of the population in St. Marks. Although the Somalis constitute only 20 percent of the St. Matthews’ population, the community is an important factor in the estate both in terms of its perceived influence and also as characterising the issue of the new arrivals versus the more established immigrant groups.

The Somali new arrivals in St. Matthews have concentrated their energies at the neighbourhood level, pursuing their interests through the voluntary sector. At the same time, many respondents lamented that “not a single Somali” had been elected to the city council to represent their interests. Efforts of a Liberal Democrat councillor to engage the community through the creation of a Somali umbrella forum were regarded with suspicion. The councillor had reportedly sought to “unite” the community, which was perceived as interference with intra-community affairs. His efforts came to naught and there was suspicion of a “hidden agenda.” According to one activist, “there was a feeling he was dictating to people from another culture. The idea did not come from the Somalis themselves. . .”⁶¹

By contrast, a councillor from St. Marks reported a high volume of contacts from her constituencies bypassing the NM board. Issues that ought to be addressed by the board got addressed to her, she lamented: “Our surgery is full of people with issues who could have gone to the neighbourhood board but they came to us because our area is underrepresented on the board.”⁶² This also contrasted with Braunstone: a Labour councillor from that area reported that the volume of his councillor work has been reduced, as much as the local activism appeared to occur at a neighbourhood level.⁶³

⁵⁸ Personal interview, Respondent No. 14, 6 March 2008.

⁵⁹ Personal interview, Respondent No. 24, 13 March 2008.

⁶⁰ Religion may be another factor: as one long-term resident and activist on the St. Matthews estate put it, “There are many whites and Indians on St. Marks and St. Matthews is geographically in the middle, so we can work together, but Hindu and Muslims don’t work together and on St. Matthews there are mostly Muslims.” Personal interview, Respondent No. 20, 17 March 2008. This contrasted with Braunstone, where NDC helped bridge the north-south divide because of an already strong Braunstone identity.

⁶¹ Personal interview, Respondent No. 14, 6 March 2008.

⁶² Personal interview, Respondent No. 22, 4 March 2008.

⁶³ Personal interview, Respondent No. 8, 11 February 2008.

Civic/Legacies Factor

Even before the board had been set up to further NM, previous interventions revealed a marked passivity of St. Marks compared to St. Matthews. While St. Matthews is noted for its “strong entrepreneurial spirit” and an active voluntary and community sector, on the St. Marks estate, there are very few voluntary sector organisations and the Estate Management Board, which was to involve residents in the management of St. Marks, had been closed down.⁶⁴ This also became the perception at both the city level and among local activists at St. Matthews. “The problem is some groups just don’t want to engage,” says one St. Marks community worker.⁶⁵ An examination of the makeup of the two neighbourhoods revealed however that socio-demographic factors would provide a more appropriate lens for explaining variations in civic activism than civic legacies peculiar to the place as such.

Socio-Demographic Factors

City authorities attribute the greater passivity of St. Marks compared to St. Matthews to the more established nature of the St. Marks estate—the predominantly Hindu Asian populations had lived there for thirty years, and the population is also aging, with young people moving out. The community illustrates what may be called “the life cycle” of activism.⁶⁶ One activist who had been among the wave of arrivals from South Asia and Africa in the late 1960s and 1970s, compared the current new arrivals in St. Matthews with the new arrivals to St. Marks at the time:

When I was young—we moved in the 70s—we had more energy, we wanted to know why there was racism. So we were saying we’re going to stand up for our rights and fight. We wanted to know where do we voice our political opinion and find out how the council works. In the early 1980s there were riots and then we got what we wanted and what we brought in was lots of opportunities for equality and investment. So that even in the planning stages with the city authorities we made sure that the process was fair. So I guess that the same is happening now with the Somali community as well.

St. Marks is characterised by old ways with more elderly people who are happy to be there. In St. Matthews you have young people with different needs. They have more energy as they have a whole life ahead of them. So they want to make sure they contribute to the place they live in. We did it in our times too. We were very active. The older people say: we’ve done our bit, and now you do yours.⁶⁷

The fact that it was more difficult to get things done for immigrants at the time spurred a desire to get involved in city politics. The mobilisation of these communities to make their voices heard succeeded in establishing channels of representation and articulation of community interests at a city level. Leicester city council has since boasted many Asian councillors. The new Lord Mayor of Leicester is a councillor representing St. Marks. She is the first female Asian Lord Mayor in the UK. At the level of the community, activism however waned as it attained its aspiration to be represented and heard in the city as it aged, and as its residents progressed up the social ladder. There is a tendency for those who have “made it” to become home owners in Oadby, Rushey Mead, or other more “posh” areas with

⁶⁴ *St. Matthews and St. Marks Neighbourhood Delivery Plan*, June 2007 (Leicester: Leicester Neighbourhood Management), p. 7.

⁶⁵ Personal interview, Respondent No. 21, 26 February 2008.

⁶⁶ Used by a local authority respondent to compare Leicester’s various neighbourhoods. Personal interview, Respondent No. 26, 7 November 2007.

⁶⁷ Personal interview, Respondent No. 16, 28 March 2008.

large Asian communities. School and education facilities are also perceived to be better elsewhere, which encourages young families to move out.⁶⁸

St. Matthews by contrast, experienced a dramatic population shift only within a matter of the last seven to eight years. The Somali new arrivals community is essential to the changing makeup of the estate, but also the nature of the activism of its residents, which is distinct from that of the St. Marks communities both in the earlier decades and now. The greater activism of these new arrivals is undeniable. While city authorities marvel at their facility for self-organisation and self-help (“they are desperate to engage”!),⁶⁹ respondents from St. Marks lamented their perceived savvy at getting resources and placing their concerns on the city agenda. The perceived discrepancy in the attention and resources that the Somalis secured from the city authorities compared with the more established communities became a source of friction among the various actors involved in the regeneration of St. Matthews and St. Marks. As one St. Marks actor, a city politician, put it, “New arrivals come as a priority and we have to welcome them but we cannot also neglect extant communities at St Marks. So this creates more hostility as people feel the new arrivals are getting more benefits. I say to people we should embrace all, but it is not the communities’ fault it is the system.”⁷⁰

Actually, people outside the city and community levels have a perception of the Somali community as active and cohesive which is at odds with the Somalis’ own perception of their community activism and goal attainment at the city level. Somali activists themselves maintained that their community is disadvantaged because of a lack of experience with democracy in their home country. One activist mused at what he perceived to be the local business and political community’s concerns of competition coming from these new arrivals: “In reality, they are not a threat as they are so weakly organised. They randomly and by chance ended up in Leicester and still need help with community leadership. . . Lots of people in the Somali community are not prepared for a democratic election process. They are too emotional or careless.”⁷¹ Says another community worker: “They are not used to being active. There are strong barriers in the sense of the system they are used to is a dictatorship and so they want things to be done for them. . . It is a slow learning process to become more active.”⁷²

The outsiders’ perception of the Somalis as active also obscured Somali intra-community divisions. The highly educated elite segment of the Somali community contributed to the perception of the Somalis as possessing high levels of activism and community engagement. In Somalia, these individuals were of high status in the local social, economic, and clan hierarchies. It would be these kinds of individuals who were more likely to survive the wherewithal of migration following civil war. Moreover, many came to the UK via other West European countries, such as the Netherlands and Denmark, acquiring further education and language skills. According to the NM manager on the estate, politics and the confidence that comes with public office came naturally to these people, as some had been highly active politically in their home country, and have even held diplomatic posts in West European capitals. One board employee, a cashier, is a Sheikh, while another is a former Somali Ambassador to Germany.

⁶⁸ Personal interview, Respondent No. 21, 26 February 2008.

⁶⁹ Personal interview, Respondent No. 26, 7 November 2007.

⁷⁰ Personal interview, Respondent No. 22, 4 March 2008.

⁷¹ Personal interview, Respondent No. 14, 6 March 2008.

⁷² Personal interview, Respondent No. 24, 13 March 2008.

The marked social and economic differences within the Somali community of immigrants, as well as the clan structure resulted in a plethora of community groups and spokespersons, each claiming to speak on behalf of the community as a whole when dealing with the NM board, the city authorities, or other actors. The community police office said: “We talk to one Somali leader who claims to have loads of influence over the whole of the Somali community but actually he has influence over one small group. So we find out that there are actually seven or eight different leaders.”⁷³

While the diversity and activism of the Somali groups was remarkable, it was therefore as much a product of pressure to get things done for themselves and their children given the horrible circumstances of post-civil war resettlement, as it was of divisions within the community itself. Just as the Somalis as a group were perceived as getting more resources and attention from without, within the Somali community, some groups were resented for allegedly receiving disproportionately more than others. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this too however is changing according to community workers as there is a greater willingness of mutual dialogue involving the various clan groups.⁷⁴

Spatial/ Infrastructure/ Anchoring Factors

Spatial and structural conditions of the St. Matthews and St. Marks estates were important in shaping regeneration interventions and outcomes. Unlike Braunstone, these were heavily built-up inner city areas with little potential for architectural planning that would radically change the nature of the cityscape. The few planning initiatives such as the demolishing of two high-rise dwellings which had become slums and re-housing residents in low-rise homes had made an important difference. Community police officers maintained that transforming the urban landscape in this way has had a “huge impact” on reducing crime.⁷⁵

At the same time, planning and architectural schemes deemed too ambitious for the neighbourhood have so far enjoyed modest success. This happened to the Peepul Centre in St. Marks, an eerily giant leisure centre out of place in what continues to look like a storage depot adjoining council housing blocks. Some respondents reported its limited use due to the locals’ discomfort at such a “posh” place that they do not identify with.

⁷³ Personal interview, Respondent No. 25, 7 March 2008.

⁷⁴ Personal interview, Respondent No. 17, 6 February 2008.

⁷⁵ Personal interview, Respondent No. 25, 7 March 2008.

Appendix

List of Interviews Conducted and Matrix for Coding Interview Respondents

Name	Neighbourhood	Date	Code of Respondents
Angie Wright, BCA	Braunstone	14 January 2008	1
Brian Quinn, BCA Services Centre, StreetWibe	Braunstone	6 February 2008	2
Chris Florence, St. Peters Church	Braunstone	3 March 2008	3
Dave Stevenson, Police	Braunstone	13 February 2008	4
Ellen Watts, Housing Office	Braunstone	25 February 2008	5
Laura Hill, BCA Services Centre (youth)	Braunstone	28 February 2008	6
Linda Grubb, Braunstone Working	Braunstone	6 March 2008	7
Michael Cook, Cllr.	Braunstone	11 February 2008	8
Paddy Mccullough, community support worker	Braunstone	6 March 2008	9
Sara Davies, CentrePoint	Braunstone	13 February 2008	10
Wayne Naylor, Cllr.	Braunstone	11 February 2008	11
Linda Glover, Cllr.	Braunstone	11 February 2008	12
Keith Beaumont, BCA	Braunstone	20 March 2008	13
Abdikah Farah, Somali Social Centre	St. Matthews	6 March 2008	14
Ahmed Bile, Leicester Partnership Rep.	St. Matthews	22 February 2008	15
Bharat Patel, Manager, Peepul Centre	St. Marks	28 March 2008	16
Brian Wheeler, NM Manager	St. Matthews and St. Marks	6 February 2008	17
Hanif Aqbany, Cllr.	St. Matthews	28 February 2008	18
Issaq Abdi, Head of Somali umbrella organisation	St. Matthews	28 February 2008	19
Jean Williams, Tenants and Elders Project	St. Matthews	17 March 2008	20
Jit Joshi, PCT worker	St. Marks	26 February 2008	21
Manjoola Sood, Cllr.	St. Marks	4 March 2008	22
Mohammad Dawood, Cllr.	St. Matthews	27 February 2008	23
Ruqia Farah, Community Mentor, gateway College	St. Matthews	13 March 2008	24
Steve Riley, Police	St. Matthews	7 March 2008	25
Cathy Carter	LCC	7 November 2007	26
Steve Morton, private consultant	LCC	4 March 2008	27
Mick O'Regan	GOEM	3 March 2008	28