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Making sense of assets: Community asset mapping and related approaches for cultivating capacities

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Making sense of assets: Community asset mapping and related approaches for cultivating capacities

A critical review of research and practice

Working paper

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Summary

This working paper critically reviews some main aspects from asset based approaches highlights key strengths and weaknesses for future research/development. Drawing on a large body of reports and relevant literature we draw on different theoretical traditions and critiques, as well as practices and processes embedded within a broad range of approaches including, widely acknowledged frameworks such Asset Based Community Development (ABCD), Appreciative Inquiry (AI), Sustainable Livelihood Approaches (SLA) and Community Capitals Framework (CCF). Although these are presented as distinct approaches, there is a sense of evolution through them and many of them overlap (in terms of both theories and methodologies). We also include emerging frameworks, including geographical, socio-spatial, visual and creative approaches, stemming from a number of projects within AHRC's Connected Communities programme and additional collaborations.

Our primarily objective have been to collate and compare insights relating to:

a) the theoretical premise of asset based approaches

b) the types of assets captured by existing approaches, and the processes/approaches to 'mapping' they deploy

c) the contextual conditions that asset based approaches seek to address

d) the strengths and weakness of specific approaches for supporting not only incremental and smaller scale changes, but also, for creating the conditions to support wider, or systemic issues and problems.

Insights from the approaches, methods and case studies we provided, suggest that asset-based approaches within communities may help generating a "reinforcing cycle" that builds on cultural recognition, social networks as well as routes to solidarity, collaboration and collective visioning or action. While we have pointed to aspects of creative engagement and the possibilities they open to micro-civic acts and cycles of symbolic recognition and self-organisation, we have also highlighted challenges stemming from essentialist premises, and stressed and importance of considering community capacity building frameworks in relation to wider systemic and societal contexts. Insights from research and practice also warn against specific assumptions concerning 'community' lacking a deep understanding of conflict, competition and controversy. Asset mapping approaches must therefore acknowledge the dialectical connections between collaborative forces and self-serving interests in communities, addressing these tensions both from a sociological, cultural and geographic framework.

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Background and aims of this paper

In community engagement and community development theory and practice, the term asset has often been used to signify value, significance and resourcefulness. Assets can be visible, tangible or external (e.g. spaces, services and infrastructures, including communications, media and informal information networks) or somewhat hidden, intangible or internal (e.g. psycho-social aspects such as aspiration, but also creative talents, skills, knowledge, social principles and emotional resources). Asset-based practices have been deployed to forge partnerships between public, third sector and community levels, as means to reveal, 'record' or 'map' out people's values and perceptions of value. At the same time, such approaches often present useful tools for public mobilisation and for the co-creation of activities which lead to the unearthing of capabilities and the cultivation of capacities within localities, at the level of the individual, the institutions, the communities or the social system. Asset mapping, then is a process of identifying and organizing assets in a community context, which could contribute to realisation of steps needed to influence change and/or build capacity, by realising strengths, or priorities for action (Alexiou et al., forthcoming, 2016; Brooks and Kendal, 2013).

Originating from competing – and often widely criticized perspectives – in social capital, asset based approaches have informed much research within *community development* and organizing contexts of social and public policy, international development and regional studies. More recently, informed by the visual turn in design and geography, asset-based approaches and derivatives have directed public engagement within urban studies, architecture as well as media and communications studies. Asset-based approaches to *capacity-building* bring forward new means for interaction of interaction between individuals, groups and their wider environments, by potentially eliciting creating thinking and discussion regarding *what* assets and values are important, for *whom,* for what *purpose* and in *what* circumstances. *Mapping* – conceptual, visual or chartographic – can be then deployed as a means for co-producing a variety of streams of knowledge or 'lived experience'.

> **Asset mapping can generate knowledge that is grounded through performative acts and creative acts: a form of knowledge that originates from below and is co-created through interaction among individuals as well as within and by groups**

Researchers, civil society stakeholders and community practitioners use a combination of methodologies and creative practices to engage with their spaces, issues and peers around issues (e.g. health and wellbeing, space, built environment, public services, urban planning and regional development). Mainstream methodologies (e.g. interviews and questionnaires, inventories, focus groups, and ethnographic immersion) are often combined with more action-based and creative approaches; these include focus groups, narrative and performance, role play creative mapping workshops and 'walk-abouts', aiming to elicit, 'data-in-action' and alternative mappings of concepts, narratives and places. Digital methods, social media and geo-social apps are also increasingly used to capture, visualize and analyse assets, deficits and the social stories in, and around localities, in relation to citizen science and participatory governance projects. Outputs from these include artist-generated or co-produced representations, audio-visual stories, as well as

concept, graphical, network or chartographical maps, which can function as objects of analysis and as instruments to inform collective planning and social action.

While applications of asset mapping as a community engagement tool are documented by some (e.g., O'Leary et al, 2011; IRISS, 2012), more recent approaches have advocated opportunities to use asset mapping as a *research tool* for understanding the *values* that drive creative civic actions and the *value* generated from these actions (Alevizou, 2014; Alexiou et al., 2016). In addition, we believe that if contextualised appropriately **asset mapping can generate knowledge that is grounded through performative acts and creative acts: a form of knowledge that originates from below and is co-created through interaction among individuals as well as within and by groups.** At the same time, suggesting that its practical, micro-applications may generate wider insights about values, perceptions and visions about possibilities, alternatives and solutions, has led to its use as a method for *co-design* or *co-production* of activities in the fields of placemaking and public services (e.g., IRISS, 2012).

In light of these developments, three aspects still remain rather ambivalent: community, assets and capacities. Firstly, 'community' involvement/engagement has increasingly become what Jones et al., call 'a totemic issue in policy rhetoric'… (2014: 323-4) calling for a wider consideration of 'communities' as contingent and plural constructs, emerging out of particular interests and challenges and drawing different groups together at different times (cf. Cohen, 1985; Rose, 2000). Within this context social and other material, political and economic circumstances (economic power, unequal distribution of wealth), that condition lived experiences (e.g. oppression, competing interests, financial crisis etc), are important to contextualise as they can play a crucial role in preventing influence or even enactment in policy and practice.

Secondly, how are capacity and capacity-building being framed? Certainly capacity building is located on the premise of creating the means to 'cultivate' or 'cross-fertilise' existing 'assets' or 'pockets of value' (skills, knowledges, aspirations and networks) at the individual and the group level within communities of practice and of place. Nonetheless tensions regarding contextual factors (socio-demographic (in)equalities) or spheres of 'leadership' prevail. Echoing critiques of social capital and resilience theories, some researchers have interrogated whether simplistically prioritising psycho-social factors and individual or collective motivations (embedded in intangible assets for example) could potentially downplay of wider material inequalities and the alleviation of the need for welfare of social services provision, leading to further victimisation or indeed to (see DeFilippis, 2001; Healy, 2005; Rapp et al., 2005; Friedli, 2013 in relation to health and wellbeing, and Grundy and Bouudreau, 2008, in relation to Creative Cities and arts-based community development projects). Such critiques warn about the hidden risks of collaborative participation frameworks, arguing that asset-based methodologies may fail to address the intrinsic complexity of community settings, participation and collaboration, and their normative uses, which may reinforce forms of oppression and control rather than liberation.

As a result, persistent questions exist as to the contexts in which, assets are framed and asset-based approaches are being used, the frameworks from which they originate, the methods they use and the insights they yield in order to influence community visibility or capacity to action. For example, which internal and external power relations exist

within communities? How do these shape and inform geographies of value? How do communities respond to change, and how does change happen?

The aim of this working paper is to critically review some main aspects from asset based approaches and frameworks, and to identify key strengths and weaknesses for future research/development. Drawing on a large body of reports and relevant literature we identify theoretical traditions and critiques, as well as practices and processes embedded within a broad range of approaches including, widely acknowledged frameworks such Asset Based Community Development (ABCD), Appreciative Inquiry (AI), Sustainable Livelihood Approaches (SLA) and Community Capitals Framework (CCF). Although these are presented as distinct approaches, there is a sense of evolution through them and many of them overlap (in terms of theories and methodologies). We also include emerging frameworks, including geographical, socio-spatial, visual and creative approaches.

The issues outlined above informed the ways in which we reviewed the literature and reflected upon our case studies. The primarily objective is to collect and compare insights relating to:

a) the theoretical premise of specific asset based approaches

the types of assets captured by existing approaches, and the processes/approaches to 'mapping' they deploy

the contextual conditions that asset based approaches seek to address

the strengths and weakness of specific approaches for supporting not only incremental and smaller scale changes, but also, for creating the conditions to support wider, or systemic issues and problems.

Although we do not specifically review or seek to assess potential avenues for analysis (or indeed analytical insights) that each of these approaches may yield within specific projects, we refer to some examples within specific case studies; our aim here is to provide enough insight and steer debate on types of avenues that can be taken to offer routes to recognition and encouragement of un- or under-utilised resources, which can be brought about in association with ethical and political objectives of community development.

The structure of this paper is as follows: we first discuss some overarching theoretical strands which influence the development of asset mapping approaches, then we review key approaches in detail, providing details from several case studies and we conclude with a discussion around the key contributions and emerging questions surrounding asset mapping approaches.

Theoretical influences

Among the most influential theoretical concepts within asset based community development approaches, is that of social capital; a fuzzy and contested term, broadly understood as 'a person's or a group's access to resources, via their social contacts' and the influence this may have to their economic, physical and emotional wellbeing or collective goals and welfare (Foley and Edwards, 1999; Naughton, 2013). Different

conceptualisations have brought social capital into use in the social sciences, most notably drawing on the work of two key theorists, Pierre Bourdieu (1985) and Robert Putman (2001a; 2001b). These address different conceptualisations of class, non-market transactions in sociological economics and the study of effective democratic processes and civic engagement respectively.

Putman's communitarian model of social capital and 'civicness' as an associational activity – 'the norms and networks of civil society that lubricate cooperation action among both citizens and their institutions, has been principally proliferated by community development practitioners and researchers in the US[1] and internationally (extensively outlined in DeFilippis, 2001) and has substantially influenced several strands of work on asset mapping, as we will discuss below. These notions stress 'non-confrontational methods' and 'consensus building' as ways to potentially bring economic prosperity (see for example, Gittel and Vidal, 1998) through low or no cost alternatives to welfare provision. The main critique of such approaches is their overemphasis on social capital which is divorced from both economic and cultural capital, stripping away power relations and empirical realities of communities.

Others have questioned how frameworks of self-help and top-down 'capacity building' can address plurality and difference in communities, as well as other political contexts and flows surrounding policy-transfer programmes, or

Stressing the importance of contextual or system-level approaches, Gutierrez-Montes et al. (2009) have proposed an approach to understanding the systems in which poverty and natural resource management issues exist, and which grew out of the practice and application of participation action research approaches (see also, Emery and Flora, 2006). They redefined basic aspects within the notion of capital as a value resource and as a constellation of values to be approached in terms of: natural, human, cultural, social, financial, built, and political. The resulting 'Community Capitals Framework' (Flora, Flora, & Fey, 2004; see below) has been used in many settings. Although not necessarily acknowledged, CCF brings about some of Bourdieu's conceptions of the individual values and capital embedded in power relations, which can begin to inform policy and organising efforts for allowing individuals and communities to realise the power needed to attract and control that capital. Researchers within this tradition have tended to highlight the factors that could prevent effective action addressing problematic issues and conditions of inequality, participation, social inclusion and distributed justice (see for example, Brooks and Kendal, 2013; Bull, et. al., 2013; Wyatt and Durie, 2013). Within social policy contexts, evidence-informed practitioners have suggested that focusing on health creation (protective factors or assets) provides better chances for sustaining gains in health or preventing risk behavours (Lindstrorm et al, 2010; Brooks et al, 2012; Kelemen and Moffat, 2014).

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[1] Work in this domain in the US includes the Urban Affairs Associations 1999 Conference 'The social reconstruction of the city: social capital and community building', and work by The Local Initiatives Support Corporation and Mott Foundation (see DeFilippis, 2001: 788).

Critiques of social capital-informed approaches of community development, often question homogenising narratives about community (or communities' state relations). While some draw on empirical evidence to contest the effectiveness of such approaches regarding both economic development and democratic governance (Devadason, 2011; Schuller, 2007; Mohan et al., 2005), others have questioned how frameworks of self-help and top-down 'capacity building' can address plurality and difference in communities, as well as other political contexts and flows surrounding policy-transfer programmes, path-dependency (Naughton, 2013, Jupp, 2013; Harrison, 2006).

Combining psychosocial and affective theories, economic geographers (Gibson-Graham, 2006), have resituated concepts such as capabilities and capacities-building, within more culturally and economically sensitive oriented approaches to social capital, some asset based approaches seek to propose frameworks that highlight the conditions for overcoming these and other conditional deficits and power. Other economic geographers however have sought to identify routes to scale up 'relational assets' identified within regional levels. Storper (1997: 5) for example, draws on the theory of conventions to analyse the micro-geographies of social identities and the participative nature of the economic actors involved so that the role of a region.

Storper's thinking here originate in the new economies of technological change of the 1980s – namely the knowledge economy – and its reliance in the acquisition of knowledges which are inherently tied into various forms of networks with firms and innovation clusters through a combination of formal and informal exchanges ('untraded interdependencies'). As Harrison (2006: 6) notes, "For Storper, the regional scale is the "key, necessary element in the 'supply architecture' for learning and innovation" (Storper, 1997: 22). Furthermore, success in knowledge creation and innovative learning processes can lead to an economic territorialisation whereby an activity's economic viability is rooted in practical and relational assets". This framework has been widely adopted by the Florida and the 'Creative Clusters' framework within cities. 'Learning regions' or localised learning/knowledge networks with

> **[…] relational assets permit previously unconnected activists to not only pull their particular resources in collective projects , but also to provide them with the cognitive capacities (e.g. know-how) needed to deploy these resources in effective ways**

their capacity to act as collectors, mediators and re-distributors of knowledge, ideas and innovation (e.g. Florida, 1995). Storper does appear to offer a case for the building up of regional institutions (including 'government agencies, civic associations, and private-public partnerships') as a window of locational opportunity which represents a "critical domain of beneficial policy intervention" (Scott and Storper, 2003: 587). Echoing some of the critiques of the asset-based relational frameworks (also reminiscent to critiques to the UK Localism Bill, see Jones et al., 2014) stating that the "regional components of economic development policy under contemporary conditions pose a knife-edge dilemma" between on the one hand desig*ned and coordinated policy to strengthen regional agglomeration economies*, and on the other hand highlighting the dangers of such isolated policies for region-specific policy Scott and Storper, 2003: 588).

Coming from a different perspective, scaling up bottom up **community activism** into wider movements through notions of relational assets is relevant here. Deriving from approaches to economic geography and social movement theory – relational assets

underpin notions of self-organisation within urban activist networks. Deploying this framework within the context of urban rights, Arabatzi and Nicholls (2013) among others contest that localised grievances spurring diverse urban residents to engage around issues of common interest, develop shared narratives and forge concrete working plans on how to achieve shared goals (Castells, 1983). Through repeated interactions such as these, different actors within localised groups, not only learn to develop trust networks, but they may also learn how to engage in the public arena (Fung, 2003). Following on the work of economic geographers, Arabatzi and Nicholls, assert that trust and know-how are crucial '**relational assets'** generated through intensive and intimate face to- face contacts (see Storper, 1997). These relational assets permit previously unconnected activists to not only pull their particular resources (eg, time, money, freedom, reputation, knowledge, etc) in collective projects but also provides them with the cognitive capacities (eg know-how) needed to deploy these resources in effective ways. In addition to relational assets, engaging in repeated struggles produces 'emotional energy' and a sense of possibility that reinforces individual attachments to collectivity (Collins, 2004).

The discussion above underpins some of the theoretical grounding and critiques pertinent to asset-based and social capital frameworks, both in terms of the policy-practitioner based 'interventions' that rely on soft institutionalism (Harrison, 2006) and through routes to 'self organisation' and grass-roots community activism. We now turn to specific approaches, drawing together different dimensions and instrumental aspects of each framework.

Asset based approaches in detail

In the following sections, we provide a taxonomy of asset based approaches. We unpack different principles and dimensions, deployed in different programmes interested in community development within a variety of contexts such as social policy, sustainable and regional development, social and cultural geography, urban studies, design, and communications. Along the discussion, specific examples are drawn to illustrate the different kinds of concerns, types of assets captured, and analytical insights gained.

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD): an action research and development tool?

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approaches (Kretzmann, 2010; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003) aim to identify communities' needs and relate them to the range of possible assets available to the community to solve existing problems and create conditions for positive change on a social and economic level. They are solution-oriented and draw on evidence-based practical frameworks. They also draw on theories of cultural and social capital as well as on material culture to emphasise 'capacity release' and 'restorative-practice' frameworks through collective 'mapping' and mobilisation of assets.

In most ABCD approaches, the project design stage is also used to set a main question, which is often based on the identification an existing problem, and to look at specific

research methods that will be employed discussed with a range of actors from social policy and civil society. This stage also generally includes the development of questionnaires, qualitative interviews and surveys questions, following by ethnographic immersion within community settings and re-evaluation of project design through collaborative means and collective visioning workshops, 'drop in' sessions, appreciative interviewing, concept maps and skills inventories (Kramer et al. 2012).

Capturing assets through a set of *pre-existing and designed community events*, such activities can provide an opportunity for cultivating new forms of sociability. Collective activities can be interpreted as extensions of existing practices of sociability. The idea beyond these approaches is that every-day practices might lead to new forms of collective action and "regenerating" practices. Insights from reports reveal that by organizing such collective activities, participants become more 'confident' and 'gain skills' over time: they cultivate energy and, by connecting with each other, they become more aware of the capacities that are available for them. It is often argued that everyday practices constitute powerful forms of activism: they enable collective identifications in unexpected areas and groups and ultimately sustain narratives of "regeneration" among communities.

> **One of the central goals of the asset-based development approach is to provide stronger ties between institutions and the residents in a locality**

As Mathie and Peters note (2014: 406) the approach does not reject outside assistance, but the external organisation is in a responsive position, partnering with communities that are organised as "agents" of their own development. "Innovation inherent in this approach is multi-layered in that it requires *a new way of working for organisations involved in development assistance*, and also generates endogenous innovation in the sense of communities organising and re-organising to meet new opportunity. Internationally, the approach has attracted the attention of organisations **promoting social and economic inclusion**; the **co-production of services with citizens' groups and other partners** (Foot with Hopkins 2010) and **community resilience through diverse livelihood strategies** (Gibson, Cahill, and McKay 2010) (cited in Mathie and Peters, 2014: 406; see also Mathie and Cunningham, 2003 and 2002).

ABCD approaches tend to combine policy analyses with thematic and discourse analysis of community generated data. Thematic analysis has proven to be particularly useful to enable critical reflecting on how communities' resources can be mapped and organized, as well community's capacities can be unlocked. Discourse analysis, on the other hand, has also been employed in these approaches to analyse participant observation notes and interviews, to offer reflections and identify gaps surrounding conditions of power. **ABCD approaches seem to present two principal advantages**. Research is facilitated within a particular action setting, **illuminating 'assets' and conditions of agency** to be explored within the participants life-world. ABCD approaches can demonstrate the interaction between ideas and personal connections. Rather than showing that 'A causes B', agent-model approaches focus on the single actions that take place 'between A and B', namely it investigates the precise nature of processes that produce structures and relationships. One of the central goals of the asset-based development approach is to provide **stronger ties between institutions and the residents in a locality**.

Strengths	Limitations
Appreciative enquiry of everyday practices of the community life and social interactions that emerge within them	Often fails to deal with questions of power relation and power inequalities
High level of specificity when moving from theory to practice	Fails to clarify the role of external institutions
An appreciative, agent-model approach	More attention needed with regards to the wider context of community life
	Applicability and advocacy must rely on more critical analysis of local contexts (or there is a risk of essentialising and lack of reflexivity)

Nonetheless, ABCD often **fails to clarify the role of external institutions in the community development process** (Kramer at al. 2012). Also, more attention needs to be paid to the wider context of power relations and power issues existing within communities. Though powerful and influential in its creative and positive engagement with local people and places, the model **does not address** the **complexities associated with local life, its multiple histories, and the challenges brought by structural inequalities**. Often, critics of ABCD have argued that it is a framework that is poorly defined conceptually, and which lacks commitment to theory building (Rapp, Saleebey, and Sullivan 2005), failing to consider the multiple structural barriers that disadvantaged communities face - in particular ignoring the non-local and macro-level origins of many local challenges that communities face, stemming from forces of neoliberalism and globalisation (Healy 2005: 256; cited in Mota and Georgiou, 2016/forthcoming).

Appreciative Inquiry (AI): an asset-based, inside-out approach

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is another approach focussed on community development. AI approaches focus on collective narratives and local histories to study how learning from the experiences and achievements of the past can prompt positive change (Foster and Mathie, 2001). Storytelling is often used a tool to encourage the unearthing of shared experiences among participants with a view to instilling confidence and ideas about change.

Not unlike ABCD, Appreciative Inquiry has been largely discussed within the body of literature that views communities in terms of their resources and assets instead of their needs (Wilkinson 1991, Kretzmann and McKnight 1993, Sherraden 1997, Wilson 2005, Mathie and Cunningham 2003, Jourdain 2005, Keeble 2006). Wilkinson (1991) notes that Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approaches can be particularly useful because they promote interaction within communities. Jourdain (2005) takes Wilkinson's discussion further by emphasising the fact that AI allows participants to perceive *their communities as spaces* for developing opportunities for positive change. The focus on narrative exchange of shared memories addresses some of the ABCD pitfalls; it allows for getting more context surrounding everyday experiences and power relations to be revealed. In addition, using

narrative exchange techniques, allows participants to co-construct journeys which they can identify with, and through which can find inspiration for future development.

Mathie and Cunningham (2003) make the case that Appreciative Inquiry approaches can be successfully used in combination with ABCD approaches. Group sessions, and narrative exchange techniques can instil feelings of solidarity and mutual recognition among participants. They can help members to identify problems of the past that have been solved by resorting to community assets and resources in specific moments of the community history. Combination of narrative exchange with individual interviews and focus groups to direct discussions about action surrounding present issues can prove a more fruitful step for collecting visioning and solution-based approaches (Mathie and Cunningham 2003).

AI approaches pay great attention to a number of elements of communities' life that are less studied within other asset-based approaches (such as creative and visual approaches), in making intangible assets more visible

Exploring everyday practices of local residents' groups within the disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Stoke-on-Trent, Jupp (2012) has combined participant observation with an appreciative enquiry approach. She has offered an outlook of how building from everyday collectivity can cultivate relational capacities embodied local everyday interactions, which produce alternative perspectives of urban activism. Approaching the 'local' as a site of urban politics, Jupp explored how narrative exchange processes and collective activities, embedded in local community centres (gardening, outdoor play), can extend through networks, feelings of solidarity and new forms of collective action and "regenerating" practices. Extending research of a feminist economic geographer Gibson-Graham (2006),) who argued for the local as a site for transformative politics, Jupp also offers alternative conceptualisations of impoverished localities as sites of alternative activism; within that '**community economies'**, where generosity and trust can mobilize 'politics of the subject', and contribute towards building confidence to fuel individual and collective empowerment: "'Capacities' are not fixed assets, but could be drawn upon in a range of both personal and more public spheres of action" (2012: 3031). In fact such capacities maybe both the resources and the outcomes of organizing.

The theoretical framework behind AI approaches draws on the assumption that communities represent cohesive groups that own a group identity and a common history (Jovchelovitch 2007), and that the multiplicity of information and knowledge produced through a projection of collective identity can be successfully mobilised to address the community needs (Tally et al. 2005). Certainly, policy contexts surrounding local engagement, and relationships of community organisers and residents with officials and official realms of action is never clear-cut; there is an emphasis on a paradigm for

Individual Assets	Relational Assets	Collective Assets
Skills, knowledge, leadership capacities, experiences, personalities, what we have, what we can bring to the group.	Networks, relationships, partnerships, friendships, kinships, group ties, associations.	Stories: traditions, cultures, institutions, norms, collective experiences.

Figure 1: O'Leary T., Burkett I., Braithwaite K. (2011) *Appreciating Assets.*

cultivating 'community economies' through every day practices, and possibly 'hybrid' forms of activism which can inhibit ambiguous spaces both within and around state-led projects. There

is an emphasis, then on the relationship between individual, and collective assets, brought about through existing relational networks and associations (see Figure 1).

One of the key advantages of using AI approaches is the constructive effect of discussions about past/historical experiences and the emphasis on unwitting involvement through collectivity and mutual recognition (Jourdain 2005, Wilson 2005). Furthermore, AI approaches pay great attention to a number of elements of communities' life that are less studied within other asset-based approaches (such as creative and visual approaches), in making intangible assets more visible.

Strengths	Limitations
Brings attention to historical experiences/processes and social and local history	Less comprehensive in identifying and discussing physical or natural assets in the community
Appreciative enquiry of storytelling/ collective memory	More attention needs to be paid on *diversity* of local context before applicability
Brings attention to collective experiences and strengthens sense of belonging in the community	Shall not only look for the existence of collective histories and common sense, but also for the absence of them (is there a set of values that holds together the community? if not, why?)

The Sustainable Livelihoods (SLA): an approach to poverty reduction

Sustainable Livelihoods Approaches (SLA) have been developed to propose **a shift from a needs-based to a resource-based attitudes with a focus on poverty reduction and natural resource management** (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993, DFID, 1999; Brocklesby and Fisher 2003, Mathie and Cunningham 2005; Gutierrez-Montes et al., 2009). As Chambers and Conway note, "a livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living: a livelihood is sustainable [as long as] mechanisms are developed to cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable opportunities for the next generation" (Chambers and Conway, 1992).

> Cultural/recreational and religious associations, associations of residents and communications associations become assets that can be mobilised to enhance people's lives on an economic level and in a sustainable manner

Based on **systems development approaches** from the perspective of the 'poor', SLA suggests that while recognizing the need to integrate economic development with environmental conservation (a root concept in sustainable development), it is important to also recognize both natural and psycho-social dimensions of livelihoods: 'SLA is oriented towards the analysis of contexts, conditions, and tendencies that affect households, as well as toward the resources (capitals) households have, and the institutional processes and organisational structures that affect their activities and livelihood strategies' (Gutierrez-Montes et al., 2009: 108).

Key resources /capitals as objects of analysis and (re)production	
Aspects/ Resources /Capitals	**Centred on promoting /producing**
• Human	• Improvement in food security
• Social	• Greater resilience to stress and shocks • Greater improvement of household and community well-being
• Natural /environmental	• Nutrition and health
• Physical	• Sustainable natural resource management
• Financial /productive	• Increased resources and levels of income

Exploring the approach in the context of rural development, Mathie and Cunningham also noted that development initiatives had addressed poverty and deprivation almost exclusively in terms of financial resources. Similarly to processes of appreciation, SLA combined with ABCD approaches advocate a shift from the conventional understanding of assets and resources (or capitals) as primarily economy-led, towards a focus to 'releasing' resources from people's lived experiences and psychosocial attributes for poverty alleviation which can include individual skills/capabilities (Mathie and Cunningham 2008), individual experiences (Brocklesby and Fisher 2003) and aptitudes (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993). Within this context, familial and local relational networks can play a role: cultural/recreational and religious associations, associations of residents and communications associations become assets that can be mobilised to enhance people's lives on an economic level and in a sustainable manner (Gran 1983). Although SLA has been principally adopted in the context of development, applications have also focused on urban development problems and social policy (e./g. families in transition).

Strengths	**Limitations**
SLA attempts to go beyond conventional methods of poverty reduction by seeking avenues that will enhance people's ability to make a living in an economically and socially sustainable manner	Politics & freedom
Train people to identify potential strategies and processes	More attention needs to be paid on *diversity* of local context before applicability
It can be combined with interdisciplinary research in poverty reduction, combining qualitative and large scale quantitative methodologies and participatory methods	

The Community Capitals framework (CCF)

An alterative method for implementing a systems- based approach to poverty, effective natural resource management and social equity, the Community Capitals framework (CCF), also focuses on endogenous development processes within communities and strategies which may lead to empowerment. Originally applied in rural and regional development contexts in the US and the Latin America (by Flora et al, 2004; Emery and Flora, 2006), CCF focuses on aspects which can be multiplied (through investment): the concept of 'capital' has been used to promote a more practical use, and the idea of *investment*, combined with endogenous and institutional resources as well as *'training'*, is thought to lead to effects of upward spiral improvement. Community capitals can be divided into two main 'factors' important to reach (or cultivate) sustainable community development: human and material.

Human	
	Social capital: networks, norms of trust facilitating cooperation and mutual benefit; bonding, bridging social capital
	Human/intellectual capital: health, knowledge, skills and motivation; aspects that be achieved through education and training
	Cultural capital: worldviews and world outlook, aspect of value and values
	Political capital: the ability to influence the distribution and use of resources
Material	
	Natural capital: landscape and any stock or flow of energy and material that produces goods and services
	Financial capital: money and flows that play a role in the economy, enabling other types of capital to be owned and traded
	Built capital: fixed assets which facilitate the livelihood of a community

Table adapted from Flora et al, 2004; Emery and Flora, 2006; O'Leary et al., 2011: 7

Again, the premise of this approach, is that through the conception of capitals, each community possesses resources– in spite of conditions of poverty or marginalization – which can be used to negotiate its own development (and possibly wellbeing).

The **strength to CCF**, is that it includes political and cultural resources, leading to a better **understanding of the importance of local knowledge**, traditions and power relations (as well as access to, and condition of, power structures). By allowing to **create collective processes for the creation of 'maps' or 'inventories' of assets across the seven categories, it stimulates a data-in-action** which could effectively lead to change through 'capital release' (O'Leary et al, 2011): 'the flow of assets across capitals … can initiate an ongoing process of assets building on assets, leading to the effect of an upward spiral" (Emery and Flora, 2006). Providing mechanisms to visualize and understand the interrelationships and interdependences among capitals in relation to social change /action strategies can generate some sense of ownership,

energy and vision which can be shared and promoted by different institutional / community actors. In addition,

> '**asset mapping can be a three-dimensional rather a simply flat** [process]…it can focus not only on locating assets within a community but also explored nested asses inside community organisations, government structures, groups and institutions. This in turn can link asset maps to social network maps – helping us to identify where the potential nodes of energy and innovation are within and between groups and organisations in a community' (O'Leary et al. 2011: 31)

Although this approach can be valuable into enabling people to understand and relate to wider social and political ecologies (social networks and support systems), it could be said that one of the main weakness of the Community's' capital approach is that it assumes an almost steady flow between stock of assets, interaction of (community) participants and indeed the capacity to build capital. Instead, the value of this apprach can only be realized if it comes to be understood as inclusive of each of the following several focal areas, and of the complex relationships between them: **People**: individuals, families, groups, small businesses(including relationships); **Socio-cultural institutional structures and processes**: including politics, social services, economics, corporations, religions, education, technology, media. **Natural and built environments**: environmental and ecological aspects (see also Plillips, 2014).

Adaptations of CCF within regional development and urban planning (Alexiou et al, 2016) have proved that asset mapping can provide a tool to understand and analyse impacts on systems in relation to:

- Interventions within the different capitals to create tangible changes

- The relevance of dialogue and reflection to facilitate transformation (or recovery) of community capitals,

and accordingly co-design strategic scenarios for community action /activism within fields of place-making, community led-urban regeneration and community media networks (see also below., 'The Creative Citizen Approach').

Socio-spatial, geographical and mixed approaches

In the approaches we have presented so far, the term '**mapping' regularly refers to the process of creating an inventory of assets**; this is often created using participatory and creative methods, which themselves may elicit psychosocial, cultural and other intangible assets (such as emotions and skills, artefacts and processes of collective belonging, identity and purpose).

Spatial, geographical aspects are also a central component in community asset-mapping. Approaches from social and cultural geography, urban studies, informatics and design primarily use geographical aspects in the process of mapping, viewing maps (and the process of mapping through participatory means) as ways to perform and explore the spatiality of socio-cultural assets, practices and relations. Use, for example, has been made of geographical information systems (GIS) software and GPS tracking to map the social character and infrastructural assets of specific areas in combination with participatory mapping, ethno-cartography (mobile interviews in walks,; public mapping workshops; participatory local planning, such as Jones, et al., 2014) and visual and playful methods for understanding and

representing people's connections with their community or locality (see Phillips, 2014; Butcher, 2014, Foth et al., 2011; Foth, 2010; Foth et al, 2008; Foth and Hearn, 2007). Such approaches often help gain insights on the way people negotiate emotional connections, notions of memory and identity, home and belonging, but also unearth contested issues surrounding inclusion, urban politics and gentrification.

Visual methods and gamification

Among studies concerned with spatial understandings of communities, visual and digital methodologies are used to generate relational geographical stories. Bringing together discussions on communities' regeneration, material culture, urban studies/design and social policy, this portion of literature illuminates the relationship between residents, the city space, and the perception of community life in the municipality.

Existing works suggest that creative community narratives are increasingly involved in processes of urban planning. Central to these accounts is the concept of experience – in particular, sensory and "lived" experiences of urban spaces as sites of recognition, local history and social memory. Within the literature on visual geographies, for example, the work of Degen and Rose (2012) is relevant here. Their study, which draws on an investigation of people's everyday experiences of designed urban environments in two UK towns, resorts to visual methods to argue that the sensory experience of urban environments is mediated by walking practices and by perceptual memories of citizens. Spatial narratives and photography are employed to explore participants' experiences of built environments. In this case, researchers report that visualization strategies were constructive in stimulating rich talks among researchers and participants (Degen and Rose, 2012).

Citizens may imagine their urban space differently and form scenarios on how to creatively perform their cultural identities within their neighbourhoods and localities

Although methods of photo-eliciation and digital story-telling do not explicitly refer to 'asset mapping', visual data and narratives produced provide insights of the ways in which assets are expressed through engagingment with "urban settings", to express intangible assets and inform more affective connections among the material, symbolic and functional dimensions of urban spaces: "sensory experiences", "memory" and snippets of "community life" and "identity". At the same time, citizens may imagine their urban space differently and form scenarios on how to creatively perform their cultural identities within their neighbourhoods and localities or to imagine settings helping to transform their urban space (see also the Creative Citizen /WCC study below and communications infrastructures approaches below).

Figure 2: Visual Methods within the Creative Citizen Project:
http://creativecitizens.co.uk/files/2014/07/GCC_Booklet_Final.pdf

Despite being substantial users of public space, youth voices in the contestation of urban life have been marginalised, in both research on cities and within policy decision making. And yet, young people, with their social lives focused on neighbourhoods, are highly knowledgeable about their local area. Creating Hackney as Home (CHAsH) was designed to understand how rapid urban redevelopment in the east London borough of Hackney impacts on young people's

g CHAsH, Mathew (PRA)

experience of this area, with a particular focus on exploring the emotional dimensions of home and belonging. It built on earlier research that suggested young people feel 'unheard', marginalised or misrepresented (see Butcher & Thomas 2003; Butcher 2010). It worked with five peer research assistants (PRAs) who had lived in Hackney for most of their lives, and building a participatory visual methodlogy, the project produced a series of short films, images, and blogs.

Figure 4: Mural in Dalston Junction, Summer 2013

These artefacts mapped in different ways not only aspects of Hackney's physical assets but also the capacity (as an asset) of young people to rework their city, and to reimagine their place within a shifting neighbourhood. Each of the five films focused on different themes chosen by the PRAs, including: gentrification; growing up and out of space; cultural diversity; fashion and identity; public and private space. Constructing the films in this way enabled the research to highlight that young people's voices are heterogenous, moving beyond the idea of an homogenous 'youth' that requires specific assets. In fact, the films, along with the research around the process of filming and collecting data, revealed the diversity of assets that young people use in Hackney, including transport, parks, youth centres, schools (after hours), void spaces under and within estates, streets, café's, gyms, etc. n addition to the films, the PRAs used flip cameras to capture their own reflections on the themes of the project, the project itself and ideas about their films. They were able to use the flip cameras to capture footage as they worked through the city, illustrating their thoughts with images, although sometimes they chose to just use audio.

Read more at: http://comparativeassetmapping.org/?p=448

and the project website: http://www.hackneyashome.co.uk/

The project focused on a town, Glossop, that had been subject to a studies that played and important role in the emergence of community studies in Britain (Frankenberg, 1966; Birch, 1959). Revisiting the mid-point of British Communities sought to explore both how the character of community may have changed since the mid twentieth century but also how the study of community has changed over this period. In particular the study sought to explore how concepts of *affect*, *affordance* and *connectivity* could be used to understand the formation of senses of **community** and **non-community.**

Figure 5: Glossopoly Board

Figure 6: Place drawing

The use of a game-based approach emerged initially as a way engage school aged children in discussions of the character of places within the town of Glossop and surrounding areas and how these children related to them. Groups of children were asked to create drawings of places they knew to populate a monopoly board of the town (Figure 6 on the left). During this activity they were encouraged to talk about the places they were drawing in order to elicit their views on their places and initiate discussions amongst the children about the character of life in Glossop. Subsequently these drawings were incorporated in a painted representation, which children used to play a game of monopoly (Figure 5 above).

Substantive engagement with the game occurs when it has been used to facilitate group discussions. In such instances the game acts to provide a series of prompts for discussion, which, as in more conventional focus groups, can be recorded for further analysis, along with the written answers and drawings created by participants of the

Figure 7: Glossopoly Card

game. The game has also evolved to encompass more action focused discussions, through the incorporation of questions and activities which ask participants to think about potential solutions to issues raised in discussions.

Figure 8: Creating Dourgoutopoli

Glossopoly has proved to be extremely flexible and can be deployed in a variety of spatial contexts and for a range of different purposes. In part, this flexibility has been achieved through conscious adaptation of the game to new contexts and purposes: in the visits to Athens (see the creation of Dourgoutopoli images, Figure 8 on the left and Figure 9

below), for example, site visits, informal interviews and secondary data sources were used to tailor the cards towards this new context and wishes of organisations involved in the comparative mapping project. Greater use of more open-style questions was also adopted to enable contextual concerns to emerge more directly. This illustrates how the game can be viewed as potentially self-contextualising in its adoption of an iterative approach whereby research materials and theoretical concerns are used as a means for stimulating further commentary and representations, which in themselves act as stimuli for further reflection and discussion. Playing games in series indeed allows material from early games to be directly incorporated into later games.

Figure 9: Creating Dourgoutopoli

Read more at: http://comparativeassetmapping.org/?p=604

Geographic Information systems

Ethno-cartographies and GIS are particularly useful when used within participatory inquiry frameworks (Quan, Oudwater, Pender, & Martin, 2001, De Gruchy (2007). Participatory GIS aims to integrate data relative to local knowledge and culture with the digital information supplied by a GIS system, and it is primarily used to produce data-intensive, development and action plans. A participatory GIS approach may be relevant to a variety of development efforts including infrastructure and facilities siting, health care service delivery, environmental initiatives, or border and resource-based conflict resolution (Vajjhala, 2005). Projects like this combine both spatial and big data approaches with community participation in order to address aspects of planning. As the author notes, "The combination of traditionally top-down GIS and bottom-up participatory mapping methods provide a vital link for designing and informing effective large-scale development plans to coordinating and im plementing locally-relevant sustainable solutions." (Vajjhala, 2005: 20).

> **GIS apps have the potential to substantially enhance the subsequent processes of synthesis and analysis needed to produce meaningful involvements, such as a Neighbourhood Plan.**

With urban studies, *Mapping for Change*, for example, a group committed to providing organizations, groups and enterprises with access to maps and techniques that will help them to make a change and improve their environments, has invested in new media technologies with the purpose of enhancing the symbolic power of communities. In this project, new technologies, tools, platforms and processes are used aiming to develop co-produced narratives and visualisations that can inform improvements at the local level, highlight social inequality and issues around marginalized groups, enhance participation and social innovation.

Case Study: Map Local. Localism and Connected Community Planning (Chris Speed and Jones et al., 2015)

The project was initiated to develop techniques that would unlock the creativity of communities by gathering materials to inform neighbourhood planning. The application was given to 25 residents in Balsall Heath and 25 residents in the Jewellery Quarter in Birmingham, and used GPS technology to allow them to pin point locations of interest in and around their neighbourhoods by taking photos and making audio commentaries. A web browser was developed to review material received from the phones over a Google map. The MapLocal app allows people to walk around
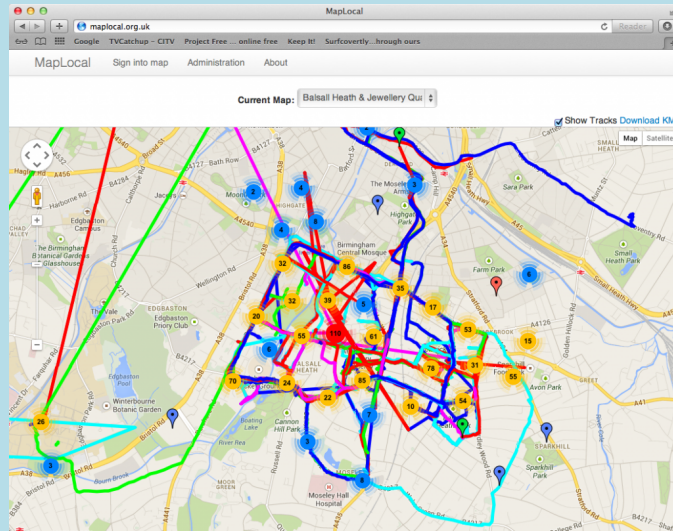
: Detail from MapLocal platform
http://maplocal.org.uk/

their neighbourhood taking photographs and making voice recordings using their smartphone. The pictures and audio clips are then uploaded to a central map which can be accessed on the MapLocal website. As more people from the local area take part, so more and more information about the neighbourhood appears on that community's map, building a detailed picture of the area. The app aimed at addressing one of the key challenges with participatory planning–collecting, synthesizing and prioritizing the different spatial knowledges and aspirations of individuals living within a neighbourhood.

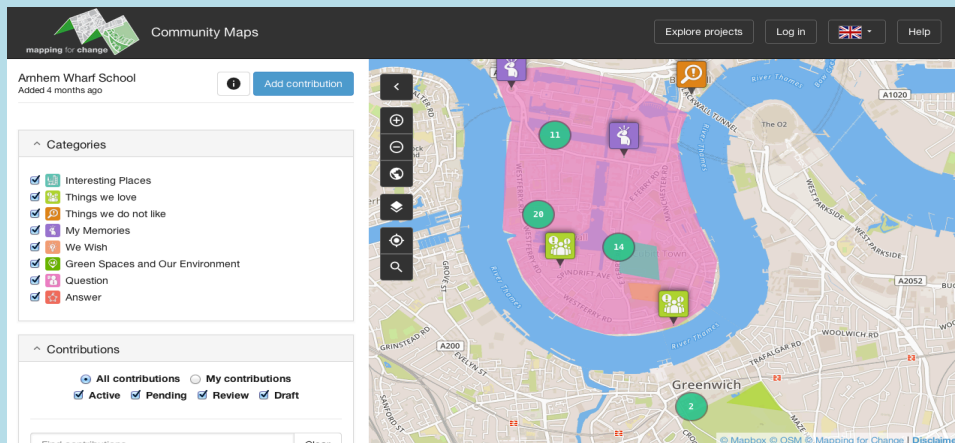Read more at Chris Speed's blog: http://chrisspeed.net/?p=1303

Figure 11: Amhem Wharf School Map by Mapping for Change

During the project "Local Schools for Local Children", The Mapping for Change group conducted research in three areas of North London (East Finchley, Hampstead Garden Suburb and Finchley Central) in order to explore the lack of good community secondary schools in these areas and promote change. As part of the application process, Geographical Information System (GIS) analysis of the socioeconomic background of school children was used to "map" the problem. The result was the developing of a Geocommons map including Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) data and the postcode of students, separated by grade level. This allowed researchers and community partners to form a much clearer picture about the level of deprivation of the children in the localities.

Read more at: https://communitymaps.org.uk/ - /project/114?center=51.4926:-0.0092:14

and at: http://mappingforchange.org.uk/projects/

GIS can be successfully used to produce rich information, it has also been argued that, facilitator input /interpretation and technical limitations can produce inaccuracies and mistakes in analysis (e.g. in terms of image samples, values, combination of data/formats/sources). As Jones et al. suggest in relation to apps like Map Local (see case study above) by engaging a diverse group of people in the process of collecting rich spatialized data about their neighbourhood, [GIS apps] have the potential to substantially enhance the subsequent processes of synthesis and analysis needed to produce meaningful involvements, such as a Neighbourhood Plan.

The question remains however in the amount of infrastructural, skills and facilitation investment. Ethical questions are also raised on how researchers and practitioners should deal with potentially misleading data produced using GIS, and with the impact that these may have on the life of communities and local groups. Likewise, although mobile apps and google witgets have made participation easier, with some cohort of people that can use such technologies or have access to devices, questions of digital literacy and socio-economic based digital devides prevail. The question prevails as to the degree of such methods are combined with more ethnographic and creative approaches to co-creation to allow users make sense of the results, in meaningful and actionable ways.

Below we summarise, some of the strengths and weakness surrounding Visual, game-like and GIS methods stemming from geography.

Visual methods and gamification	
Strengths	**Limitations**
Can prompt rich narratives through sensory, affective lived experiences of places	Remains idiosyncratic and may be difficult to generalize
Unleashes creative capital and foster skills of articulation	Relies on a lot of facilitation and longitudinal support
Involves an element of co-creation (of narratives)	

GIS –based mapping	
Strengths	**Limitations**
Ability to provide detailed information about specific context/community/locality	Remains idiosyncratic and may be difficult to generalize
Successfully combines quantitative and qualitative methods and dimensions	Needs to be integrated with the wider context: questions of power/ representation / culture / identity
Can implement locally-relevant sustainable solutions to communities' problems	Ethical issues related to technical limitations and data generation: impact of erroneous data on communities' life? What does this mean for theory and practice?
	Iterative processes in the method and combination with other methods is need to allow actionable insights emphasis on co-production

Approaches focussed on creative capital(s) and on communicative infrastructures

Many creative techniques (like film, digital storytelling etc) have already been mentioned in previous sections as tools for helping unearth assets and people's perceptions and discourses around assets. In recent years we are witnessing a rise in the use of creative techniques, in concert with a rising emphasis on participatory action research and on the notions of co-design and co-creation within community research (e.g. Durose et al, 2012). There is indeed a group of asset mapping approaches that can be thought to form a category of their own, as they focus on the use creative techniques (ranging from visual

arts, theatre, music, film and storytelling, to design probes and prototyping) to help discover and unleash the creative capital of groups and individuals, with a view to address solutions to problems and unleash processes of co-coproduction.

These approaches have a two-fold characteristic: while on the one hand they focus on devising and using creative techniques in order to map assets of different types they also aim to create the conditions for unearthing and utilising the creative capital of people (their ability to design new things, places, services, processes or policies). They thus have a methodological as well as practical element and are also embedded in wider theoretical discussions as they are often realised within community-academic collaboration settings. Three examples are worth mentioning here.

Tidworth Mums and a case of soft play

Figure 12: Collecting data about play preferences

One such example is the approach used to co-design a model of play provision with a community of parents from **Tidworth**. The aim, approach and outputs of this project were co-developed by The Glass-House, The Open University and Tidworth mums, a community group consisting of female parents from Tidworth and the surrounding area (see Unearth Hidden Assets, 2014 and also project site[2]). The overwhelming majority of these women are the wives of army employees although there are also some civilian parents. The community and the specific context of their life are of particular interest and importance as it is characterized by weak social structures (e.g. mums often live as single parents, friendships are difficult to build and maintain, planning and support is difficult) and lack of social and recreational spaces.

The project was developed in various stages following an 'introvert - extrovert' approach starting with explorations and reflections within the group, followed by connecting and working with a wider context and then coming back for further work within the group. During the introvert phase, asset mapping was used as a part of a wider set of activities and methods aiming to explore opportunities, develop a vision and unearth assets available to the community. This included skills and resources in the wider community (volunteers and people who support them), time,

Figure 13: Collecting data about play preferences

relationships with other groups and organisations and spaces. In the extrovert phase a study tour to explore the meaning of play and learn from other examples was organised and later a survey exploring the play provisions in the area and the desired characteristics of those. This phase

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[2] http://www.theglasshouse.org.uk/unearth-hidden-assets/

culminated in a mega soft play event to provide a proof of concept for the need of a soft play facility in the area but also as a tool for capturing what is the meaning of play for children and their parents. In the final introvert phase a Dragon's Den workshop was organized in order to reflect on the possible business model for soft play provision in Tidworth area and its relation to the group. The core motivation of this exercise was to prepare the group for any future discussions with other stakeholders.

Figure 14: Asset Mapping with TIdworth Mums

Key learning points

The following key research findings were identified in relation to the creative process within these approaches:

1. Unearthing hidden assets is the product of the co-design process.

The specially designed asset mapping exercises were a very good tool for:

- Reflecting on a range of assets,

- Framing what are the most important assets of the particular community (e.g. people, Facebook group(s))

- Directing the attention to assets that need some effort for their mobilization (e.g. spaces, time and relationship with other organisations)

However, the overall co-design process could also be seen as the process for unearthing hidden assets. *Co-design* meant that in the group we were collectively trying to imagine and experiment with new possible realities for the community (e.g. the organization of a Mega Soft Play event) not only as a way to act within a community but also as a tool for self-reflection and unearthing of assets. The notion of play and the importance of specific individuals and social relations emerged from this process as the hidden assets of the particular community.

2. Assets are not 'a priori' or 'static' entities.

Following the above points, assets are co-created and dynamically redefined within a community in relation to a fluid 'problematic situation'. The project started by looking at hidden assets such as 'time' and 'spaces' and slowly discovered other assets related to play, individuals and social relations. The meaning of these assets was changing in time (see also, The GlassHouse, 2014[3], and Lam, 2014[4]).

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[3] http://www.theglasshouse.org.uk/unearth-hidden-assets/
[4] http://comparativeassetmapping.org/?p=300

Case Study: Cultural Animation (The New Vic Theatre) : Mihaela Kelemen

Another relevant case is Cultural Animation, an approach that has been pioneered in the UK by the New Vic Theatre through its outreach department, Borderlines and its Director, Sue Moffat. Although not directly subscribing to the notion of asset based community development, Cultural Animation is a relevant approach for the purposes of this review as it uses performance and other forms of arts, music, poetry and crafts, to help people articulate ideas and life experiences and energise them around core themes and problems that require solutions. Cultural Animation is underpinned by an American Pragmatist philosophy which regards experience as being the starting and ending point of knowing (Kelemen and Rumens, 2013; Kelemen and Moffat, 2014 – see link below). Rather than being antithetical to knowledge, experience is part of it and contributes to its enhancement.

For example, one project aimed to co-design a health agenda with local communities in Stoke on Trent, starting from a community of older people

...der of participation:
...ve Workshop within
... of Health

and their own experiences, perceptions of health, and skills that can help take things forward. The project unearthed a number of assets among which:

- The time and productive engagement of community members, many of whom had no particular input or voice to health sector debates previously.
- Individual and collective creativity, for example musical and dramaturgical talents.
- Access to networks previously unavailable.
- Access to information previously unavailable.

In the process, participants create experiences and artifacts (such as poems, songs, puppets, human tableaux, mini performances and installations, and documentary dramas) that are memorable and energise people around core themes and problems that require solutions. When people make such art together, they engage in different forms of communication, re-define relations between themselves, between ideas and concepts and this allows for new identities to emerge and a sense of community to be formed.

One of the **major strengths** of this approach, is indeed that it relies to the **performative process to dissolve commonsensual hierarchies of expertise**. As Kelemen and Moffat have noted (Kelemen and Moffat, 2014: np) dramaturgical techniques engages with the yawning gap between "official" plans and strategies for public services, to explore what people actually say they want, and to put new ways of communicating across this gap". Nonetheless, it's limitation lies in the very notion of orchestrating collaboration among diverse participants and in 'translating' emotions and artistic expressions in an accessible or more generisable way. Major artistic installations and filmic representations of documentary theatre address this challenge somewhat (see also, Kelemen and Hamilton, 2015).

Read more at: http://comparativeassetmapping.org/?p=243

Asset mapping and Civic Creativity

The third example, is an approach developed as part of the *Media, Community and the Creative Citizen* project (Alevizou, 2014a; Alevizou, b; Alexiou et al, 2016), which combined aspects stemming from ABCD with dimensions stemming from theoretical approaches to social and cultural capital, participatory planning/co-design as well as media and communications. The team aimed to develop an original approach to asset mapping as a research, engagement method and a tool for co-creating emerging actions and social media campaigns/contents with community groups. The aim has been to enable participants generate shared

Figure 16: Creative Citizen Approach: Engagement

visions about their projects, discuss what they like and what they like to change in their localities, and exchange ideas about how to co-develop outputs and share their stories relating to their projects and aspirations using different technologies and media.

The approach enables people to see things differently, gain more confidence in articulating issues and priorities and think more creatively about ways to collaborate for future action.
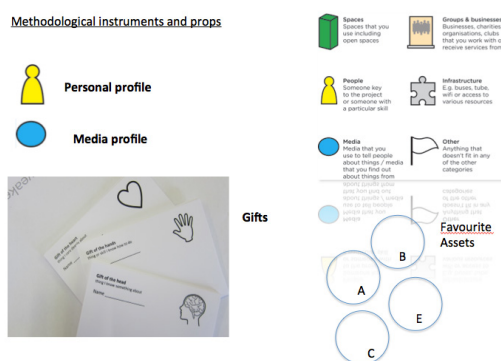
Figure 17: Creative Citizen Approach: 3 dimensional Instruments

The approach uses physical objects to represent different types of assets. **The participants are asked to place three-dimensional objects in the a map organized around three concentric circles of 'importance' and to move around the objects as way for negotiating in situ their importance for their individual community projects.** The 'mapping' process and the group discussion were useful for eliciting and recording values, cultural associations and perceptions of value and provided a good way for unearthing social capital and the relationships of people with places, services, environments, through media networks and with each other.

These different assets formed the basis for a co-design exercise aimed at creating ways to engage with their wider communities to pursue goals within specific or fluid community projects.

The approach enables people to see things differently, gain more confidence in articulating issues and priorities and **think more creatively about ways to collaborate for future action**. Participants also reported that it is important for the researchers to become more embedded in the group's priorities and meetings, gain a deep understanding of purposes and establish close

Figure 18: Mapping assets

connections and trust in order to ensure the feasibility and sustainability of projects.

By visualising the maps, and attaching transcripts from discussions in specific locations within maps, we were able to gain an understanding and report back to groups (relatively quickly) about ideas, values and priorities participants they had expressed – in relation to current and potential areas for development.

Case Study: Co-creating digital media for participatory planning:
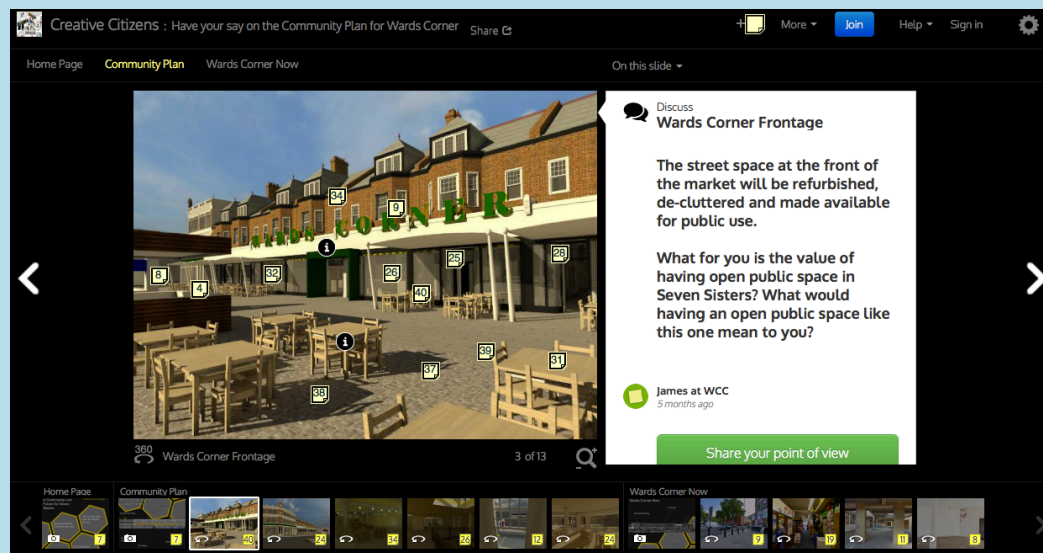the case of WCC (Giota Alevizou)

Figure 19: Stages in the co-creation of the Community plan within an immersive platform

Approaches to asset mapping methodologies are often used within urban and community informatics research to inform the design of technological platforms and locative media; these may offer opportunities to move beyond the conception of users as abstract / passive and into developing the conditions for the co-production of civic media with the view to creating contexts for more inclusive or representative communities (Foth and Adkins, 2006; Klaebe and Foth, 2007; Hearn, Roodhouse and Blakey, 2007).

Wards Corner Community Coalition (WCC – see link below), one of the groups that was supported by the Open University team of researchers, identified the need for developing media platforms that would utilised existing material that would feature in an alternative community-led plan. Their Community Plan – identified as central in the asset maps produced with the group – was at the time of the workshop under development.

The team of researchers worked with an architectural, member of WCC, to put forward ideas, community feedback and designs in the planning application proposing the restoration of the Wards Corner building. This has been a contested site and host of a vibrant, indoor, Latin American Market above Seven Sister's Tube in Tottenham, North London. While visual content – in the form of three-dimensional computer generated sketches – existed alongside technical specifications and community input that

Figure 20: Asset mapping workshop with WCC

would feature in the official planning application, the group had identified a key priority for co-designing any medium: the need to showcase the plan in an accessible way and engage further with those directly affected by any changes in the block. They strived to develop a platform for consultation or a platform that would give others the opportunity to express their voice and share ideas about the future. Sourcing on the creativity and commitment of several people within the WCC group – as it was unearthed in several workshops and meetings (including the asset mapping) – was paramount in ensuring the stages for the development of WCC Room within StickyWorld.COM StickyWorld was used as the main medium used to 'translate' the projected sensory & social experience of the building in proposed plan and to elicit feedback on the official application; it was also used to enhance the aura of alternative plan – the multicultural draw – an expressed asset about the area – and stimulate further engagement with the relevant stakeholders, who could perhaps have overlooked these aspects in the official document of the planning application. This particular intervention has been situated with the group's emerging creative media practices and was embedded in existing communicative practices. It also involved the co-production of a booklet to showcase the plan on StickyWorld, participating and hosting local events to showcase and engage others in the plan (virtually and physically) and identifying champions to showcase the plan and help recording voices and recommendations. By identifying these resources in asset mapping and subsequent meetings, discussions and workshops, we were able to co-define and inform stages of research and action and draw out aspects that would have not been necessarily apparent in initial stages.

Figure 21: Computer Generated images from the Community Plan
& Vision of the Sticky World Virtual Tour
(https://cc.stickyworld.com/room/presentation?roomid=11)

Read more at: http://comparativeassetmapping.org/?p=98
and at: http://wardscorner.wikispaces.com

Digital and networked media, but also creative arts practices (including participatory film-making and cultural animation, as several collaborators within this project have deployed in respective projects) can foster the activation and embeddedness of rich, multivalent conceptions of the situated experience of peoples' environments and localities, of social connections and creative expressions. Creative expression in this respect, seeks to address both the process of the media-making (platforms, technologies, contents), but also use media practices and creative techniques to represent wider communities in a more inclusive manner.

A summary of strengths and weaknesses of the approaches outlined above:

Strengths	Limitations
Able to provide detailed information about specific context/community/locality	Engagement is often short term, which may impact the potential of producing sustainable, long-term solutions
May successfully combine quantitative and qualitative methods and dimensions	Systematic observation, collection and analysis of data may be difficult, because of the temporal/performative element of some approaches, and the focus on practical outcomes
Can implement locally-relevant solutions to communities problems	Enough contextual information (about group's history, relationships and civic practices, issues around areas/localities, etc) may be recorded (using interviews and participatory ethnography approaches) and analysed to identify ways to build capacity and influence, but also to fuel rigorous and theoretically informed analytical insights
Based on co-creation and co-production	
Supports capacity building through cultivating creative as well as social capital	

Approaches focused on communication infrastructures

One critical aspect for urban infrastructures, which is often overlooked in urban studies, are *communication infrastructures*. These entail technologies, media consumed locally – having been produced either locally or transnationally – and systems of face-to-face communication (Ball-Rokeach and Kim 2006). **Communication assets** constitute elements of the communication infrastructures that can be mobilised to achieve immediate goals, but also to sustain longer-term projects (Chen et al. 2013) - not least **a collective sense of belonging** (Motta et al. 2013).

These assets only reveal the specificities of the locale's communication cultures, but also the locale's openness through multiple connectivities beyond its boundaries (see for example Leurs 2014). Communication assets include, for instance, *ethnic and local media*. Whereas the first reaffirm ethnic **community ties *within* and *beyond* the locale**, the second (such as neighbourhood press or

hyperlocal media) emphasise the particularity of **communication and engagement** *within* **a specific place** (Ball-Rokeach and Kim 2006; Chen et al. 2013). Both kinds of media, in their complimentary but also contradictory functions, become critical in managing social ties in the locality and beyond. Importantly, communication assets constitute symbolic, social and material resources that allow **building sustained** and **purposeful quotidian mobilisation in urban locales**. Ball-Rokeach et al. (2006; 2001) emphasise that they are resources used by residents to improve grassroots civic engagement, provide an identity, and create visibility for ethnic groups within their locales. This conceptualisation builds on the wider and growing literature of community assets, recognising that societies and communities have a range of symbolic and material resources at their disposal when developing projects, staking claims and developing social capital. It also links to action research[5] and the attempt to incorporate local knowledge in the implementation of local projects (Stringer 2007).

Metamorphosis, based at the University of Southern California, builds on the people-centred approach of ABCD in dialogue with Putnam's social capital analysis (2000), we discussed above. Using the concept of communication assets within *Metamorphosis'*

> Alongside those assets associated with place, the research team also recognises communication discursive resources (CRDs) as representing the social actors involved in neighbourhood storytelling

broader model of Communication Infrastructure Theory (CIT), Ball-Rokeach and Kim (2006) define communication assets as physical components of the urban environment that residents consider positive spaces of social and community interaction. These communication assets can take the form of *hotspots* – where residents gather to talk – and *comfort zones* – community institutions and locations that residents feel most connected to (MetaConnects.org, 2013).

Hotspots and comfort zones are seen as valuable elements of communities in their civil engagement and **advancement of collective efficacy** (Ball-Rokeach and Kim 2006) and are identified through surveys, focus groups and creative maps. Alongside those assets associated with place, the research team also recognises *communication discursive* **resources (CRDs) as representing the social actors involved in** *neighbourhood storytelling*: a "type of communicative action that addresses residents, their local communities, and their lives in those communities… [It is a] process of constructing and reconstructing discourse about community identity, issues, and action strategies" (Ball-Rokeach and Kim 2006: 178). Such discursive resources are particularly relevant to our understanding of the ways in which people in localities connect, disconnect and enhance their participation and collective belonging to their area.

One of the main contributions of *Metamorphosis* resides in the methodology of communication-based asset mapping itself. This combines both qualitative and quantitative methods and provides a model that measures the efficacy of certain communication infrastructures that support civic participation. While adopting a holistic approach to communication and community, the complex model can be challenging in its applications in different locales. In addition, the *Metamorphosis* team also puts its emphasis on rational choice and the active search for connections among individuals and communities (Ball-Rokeach and Kim 2006). In taking this position, authors conceptualise narratives and actors as predominantly rational, and of activities as instrumentally deployed in service of collective or individual prosperity[6].

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[5] Action research aims to help resolve issues or achieve goals, and focuses on understanding specific situations, providing information and means for people to increase the effectiveness of their work (Hearn et al. 2009).

[6] See also http://welcometocup.org/ and http://metaconnects.org/asset-mapping
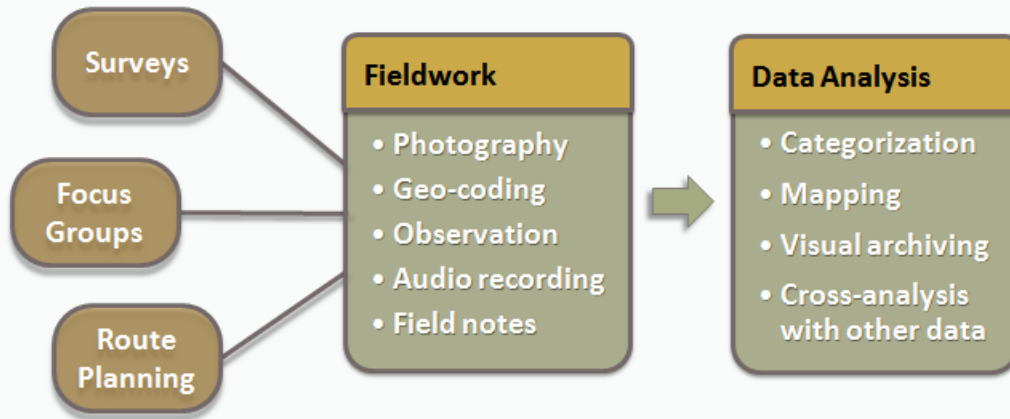
Figure 22: Metamorphosis Communication Asset Mapping protocol chart
(source: http://metaconnects.org/asset-mapping)

Case Study: Community through digital connectivity? (Myria Georgiou)

"**Community through digital connectivity? Communication infrastructure in multicultural London**", led by Dr Myria Georgou, has explored the role of digital connectivity in promoting ideas of community communication in the diverse area of Harringay in North London. In particular, this research brings visibility to the role of digital media and

communications as community assets that are used to develop temporal and sustained networks and associations, which may advance residents' engagement with local life. This connects with the findings of Ognyanova et al. (2012) work, which focuses on **community-oriented Internet participation** and its association with traditional predictors of civic engagement. In dialogue with the ABCD approaches, **the Metamorphosis Approach, and the Creative Citizen asset mapping approach (see above)**, the team conceptualised assets to include different elements of communication infrastructures that range from the material and immaterial and from the social to the physical, while recognising their potentials and limitations in enhancing participation and collective sense of belonging. In line with approach we also applied creative asset-mapping methods alongside other methods, conducting a survey, focus groups, a public engagement event, but also ethnographic research.

Figures 23 & 24: Crossfertilising methodologies from Communications Infrastructures and The Creative Citizen Approach

Their analysis poses larger questions about the **democratic potential of digital media in diverse communities, exploring the relationship between online and off-line forms of local involvement**. As the researchers note "Asset-mapping provided us with invaluable tools to record their role in enhancing participation and collective belonging in three ways. **First, asset-mapping allowed us to become aware of different ways in which sharing of information, knowledge and sociality is organised in urban locales**, not least through complex systems of physical and mediated congregation. In addition, it allowed **to understand the potential of communication infrastructures to turn into assets that enhance civic engagement and urban publics**, **even if they are always subject to exclusions or inequalities**. Diverse systems of urban communication might challenge certain forms of exclusion – through translation, mobilisation, and voice – but they can also reproduce inequalities – in terms of who speaks and on behalf of whom. Thirdly, **the rich map of communication assets this study produced was critical in conceptualising urban communication at the meeting of face-to-face and mediated exchanges**, especially in recognising the significance of physical congregation when urban mediated communication becomes increasingly fragmented. Thus, mapping and engaging in understanding communication and local assets can also motivate a dialogue on ways of conserving and improving existing local resources, addressing the opportunities and challenges of inclusive urban publics." (Insights from Mota and Georgiou, 2016/forthcoming, and Georgiou, 2014)

Read more at: http://comparativeassetmapping.org/?p=317

Conclusions

The insights offered from the approaches reviewed in this paper suggest that asset-based approaches are primarily instrumental as they provide possibilities for enhancing inclusiveness, creativity, capacity and value within communities. Furthermore, inside-out approaches tend to build on empowerment and collaboration through the use of participatory techniques and activities. Participation is directly linked to empowerment, because it promotes the sharing of ideas that can foster skills, abilities and knowledge at community level (Mason, McNulty & Aubel, 2001). While addressing wider critiques and shortcomings, we have tried to highlight aspects that each approach, and relevant methods highlight in terms of:

- Types of assets they seek to unearth
- Issues about capacity building and community development
- Robustness of method
- Inclusivity and engagement
- Analytical concerns and generalizability
- Impact and legacy

We have tried to identify theoretical and analytical underpinning regarding **different types of "mapping"** within the realm of asset mapping approaches. In all the approaches we have outlined we assert that notions of **public and symbolic capital**, need to be stressed: these provide routes to organized spaces for interaction and avenues for learning about, discussing and often acting upon community challenges. A second function of mapping refers to the **mapping of culture**, and focuses on documenting cultural belongings in the community (these include customs, behaviours, activities and narratives). **Cultural mapping is instrumental in promoting self-awareness and understanding of the social diversity within a community**. Finally, asset based approaches can also map **community relationships and networks, identifying linkages within the community** and illustrating how these can relate to funding, access to resources or joint service planning. Insights from the approaches and case studies we provided suggest that asset-based approaches within communities may help generating a "reinforcing cycle" that builds on the community cohesiveness, solidarity and collaboration.

However, we also identified a number of weaknesses and limitations of asset mapping approaches. One weakness is the assumption that a participative and collaborative nature can be systematically found in communities. The main risk in this sense is to generate research that draws on essentialist premises, failing to consider variations in identities, contexts, and cultures across communities. A second pressing issue with asset mapping is the recurrent assumption that communities are congruent with their geographical locations and boundaries. While this interpretation of community may be correct in some contexts, it not always is. Assuming the equivalence of communities and geographical spaces may lead to a superficial interpretation of problems and assets that does not take into consideration the profound implications of identity and diversity. Insights from the literature that has been reviewed also warn against specific assumptions concerning 'community' lacking a deep understanding of conflict, competition and language. It is suggested that communities are formed with both

participatory, collaborative and solidarity-building forces and competitive and conflict-driven tensions. This is especially true when problems related with scares or non accessible resources exist. Asset mapping approaches must therefore acknowledge the dialectical connections between collaborative forces and self-serving interests in communities, addressing these tensions both from a sociological, cultural and geographic framework.

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