Towards the 'Big Society': What role for neighbourhood working? Evidence from a comparative European study

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Editorial Notes and Acknowledgements

Abstract

Under the New Labour government, the neighbourhood emerged prominently as a site for policy interventions and as a space for civic activity, resulting in the widespread establishment of neighbourhood-level structures for decision-making and service delivery. The future existence and utility of these arrangements is now unclear under the Coalition government's Big Society proposals and fiscal austerity measures. On the one hand, sub-local governance structures might be seen as promoting central-to-local and local-to-community devolution of decision-making. On the other, they might be seen as layers of expensive bureaucracy standing in the way of bottom-up community action. Arguably the current value and future role of these structures in facilitating the Big Society will depend on how they are constituted and with what purpose. There are many local variations. In this paper we look at three case studies, in England, France and the Netherlands, to learn how different approaches to neighbourhood working have facilitated and constrained civic participation and action. Drawing on the work of Lowndes and Sullivan (2008) we show how the achievement of civic objectives can be hampered in structures set up primarily to achieve social, economic and political goals, partly because of (remediable) flaws in civic engagement but partly because of the inherent tensions between these objectives in relation to issues of spatial scale and the constitution and function of neighbourhood structures. The purpose of neighbourhood structures needs to be clearly thought through. We also note a distinction between 'invited' and 'popular' spaces for citizen involvement, the latter being created by citizens themselves. 'Invited' spaces have tended to dominate to date, and the Coalition's agenda suggests a fundamental shift to 'popular' spaces. However we conclude that the Big Society will require neighbourhood working to be both invited and popular. Citizen participation cannot always replace local government – sometimes it requires its support and stimulation. The challenge for local authorities is to reconstitute 'invited' spaces (not to abolish them) and at the same time to facilitate 'popular' spaces for neighbourhood working.

1. Introduction

We were motivated to write this paper by a shared sense that neighbourhood working in the UK currently finds itself at a crossroads.

Under the New Labour government, with its 'third way' agenda for tackling social exclusion, improving public services and remedying the democratic deficit, the neighbourhood emerged prominently as a site for policy interventions and as a space for civic activity. From the moment of its election in 1997, New Labour adopted a sharp focus on the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and one in which local communities were seen as central to solving problems. Following investigations into neighbourhood problems and solutions by the Social Exclusion Unit (1998) and later its Policy Action Teams, the government established the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR; SEU, 2001), a cross-government programme of investment and action targeted towards the poorest neighbourhoods. This programme pointed explicitly to the need to identify and respond to neighbourhood issues and co-ordinate services. It established a Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF)[1], and required local authorities eligible for the Fund to set up Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), bringing together a range of public, private and third sector organisations at the local authority level to develop neighbourhood strategies and direct NRF spending. NSNR also incorporated a number of specific programmes that specifically required neighbourhood-level working. For example, thirty-nine New Deal for Communities (NDC) initiatives were run by neighbourhood-based elected boards and developed ten-year neighbourhood strategies, delivered by locally-based teams; thirty five Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders (NMPs) were concerned with co-ordinating services at a neighbourhood level. Lessons learned from these programmes informed a wider roll-out. LSPs were extended to areas and the government also encouraged (although did not require) larger urban councils to develop multi-agency arrangements at a neighbourhood level, similar to ones that had emerged through NSNR. These emerging local and neighbourhood working structures provided new opportunities for residents and third sector organisations to participate both as strategic partners and as delivery organisations, for example through contract-based commissioning. At the same time, New Labour also seemed keen to promote greater community involvement in decision making and to support community organisations to develop their capacity, skills and local projects, providing modest support for community action at the neighbourhood level through programmes like the Community Empowerment Fund and Community Chest.

Many commentators have criticised the limited impact and inclusiveness of area-based initiatives, arguing that they have failed to engage with the structural causes of poverty and inequality and they represent little more than 'gesture' politics (Syrett and North, 2008 cited in Durose and Rees forthcoming). Indeed, the government itself

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1   Succeeded in 2007 by the Working Neighbourhoods Fund (WNF) which has now been discontinued.

appeared to lose faith in this approach to some extent in its last term, at least as a strategy for achieving substantial change in the geography of poverty. Following a Cabinet Office review (2005), policy emphasis shifted towards more strategic and larger scale approaches (Power 2009, Durose and Rees forthcoming), and the neighbourhood lost its prominence at the centre of policy pronouncements. However, by this time structures had become well-established at neighbourhood level in many places, and in a variety of policy areas. Many local authorities now have a neighbourhood-based organisational structure for some types of decision-making and for the organisation of some services, typically regeneration, housing, and environmental services. These have provided the focus for neighbourhood organisation in other services, such as policing, public health and family support services, and for multi-agency neighbourhood partnerships. New Labour's 'Total Place' initiative, which encouraged public sector organisations to work together to map total spend in local areas and to consider how funding streams could be combined, was also beginning to stimulate interest in more locally-based, cross-agency budgets in some places when Labour lost power in 2010.'Neighbourhood' is also a space that citizens identify with and feel a sense of belonging and where the issues which matter and affect the lives of citizens and communities are in sharpest relief (White et. al 2006, Durose and Richardson, 2009). So the importance and value of neighbourhood working appears to have become well embedded, although certainly its implementation is highly variable from one place to another.

The new Coalition government, elected in 2010, has pinned its colours to the mast of 'localism'. As Eric Pickles - Minister for Communities and Local Government – noted, 'I have 3 very clear priorities: localism… My second priority is localism, and my third is… localism' (2010). A new Localism Bill was published in December 2010 promising "a radical shift of power from the central state to local communities" (HM Government 2010, p2), thus articulating the Conservative desire for a 'Big Society' with smaller government and more community involvement in social action and public service delivery, and the Liberal Democrat desire for decentralisation and "community politics". The Big Society agenda wraps up public sector reform (asking citizens to think about 'what the state can do for you'), community empowerment ('what we can do for ourselves') and philanthropic action ('what we can do for others'). The government has pledged itself to reduced bureaucracy, greater transparency, more freedoms for local authorities, greater diversity of service provision as well as a range of measures to encourage volunteering and involvement in social action and to train a new generation of community organisers and support the creation of neighbourhood groups across the UK. In addition, it is promising to support the creation and expansion of mutuals, co-operatives, charities and social enterprises and enable these groups to have much greater involvement in the running of public services. A 'Big Society Bank' has been set up to provide new finance for neighbourhood groups, charities, social enterprises and other non-governmental bodies.

Ostensibly the neighbourhood is very prominent in this agenda. Yet it is not obvious what specific role will be played by neighbourhood structures. The Coalition has

given strong endorsement to the principles of "double" devolution, from central government to local authorities and from local authorities to communities and individuals. However it is unclear at this stage what will be devolved to whom: whether 'communities' are effectively seen as operating at the local authority level (*local* communities as opposed to *central* government) or at the neighbourhood or locality level (local *communities* rather than local *authorities*). Under the former model, neighbourhood structures for local authority services could be seen as an essential part of the devolution of services; under the latter they could be seen as a layer of official bureaucracy obstructing decision-making and service delivery by groups of interested citizens. One implication of the freeing up of local authorities from central government control is that we are highly unlikely to see any specific guidance or prescription from central government on how decisions should be made or services run at neighbourhood level, leading to a variety of local arrangements.

At the same time, widespread public spending cuts may well threaten some neighbourhood level services and the management structures that support these services, as well as voluntary and community involvement. Additional funding programmes for neighbourhood regeneration akin to those announced in 1997, which were instrumental in giving rise to neighbourhood structures, seem highly unlikely in an environment of doing 'more with less'. In fact, the focus on neighbourhood regeneration within the Department of Communities and Local Government seems to have disappeared in a new organisational structure that promotes the Big Society everywhere, rather than concentrating efforts on disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In combination the 'radical localist austerity' engendered by the recent Comprehensive Spending Review and the Coalition's apparent lack of solutions to the problems of the poorest neighbourhoods may cause some commentators to re-think their critical analyses of New Labour's targeted funded interventions at the neighbourhood level (Durose and Rees, forthcoming). In short, we have moved from a situation in which neighbourhood working was becoming widely established to one in which it appears supported in principle, but potentially vulnerable in practice. It is not clear at this stage what role, if any will be played by existing neighbourhood structures, nor what new structures may be necessary to deliver the Big Society agenda.

In this context, this paper is partly designed both to inform emerging policy at national level, and partly to help local authority policy-makers to anticipate and make sense of likely changes and their implications, and to evaluate the fit between existing structures and new policy objectives. We start from the position that neither commitment to engaging people in local problem solving nor devolving the powers to do this are new ideas in the UK or elsewhere in Europe. As such, there is plenty to be learned from existing examples. We therefore take an empirical and comparative approach, examining different models of neighbourhood working from across Europe with different approaches to ideas of 'localism' and civic participation. In particular, we draw on three city case studies: Liverpool, England, which set up five Neighbourhood Management Areas across the city in 2007; Roubaix, France, which has had five Neighbourhood Councils (underpinned by Neighbourhood Committees) since 2003; and Rotterdam in the Netherlands, with its fourteen City-District

Councils. We review these different approaches against a typology of rationales for neighbourhood working set out by Lowndes and Sullivan (2008; see also Durose and Richardson, 2009) in order to identify why and how different models contribute differently to the achievement of civic objectives. From this we draw conclusions about what existing neighbourhood structures are likely to contribute to Big Society objectives and how they might need to be developed, whilst also highlighting the risks to equitable participation, local democracy, and effective service delivery that may arise either from unsuitable forms of neighbourhood or from their absence, particularly in disadvantaged urban areas.

2.   The Many Purposes of Neighbourhood Working

One of the difficulties in working out what role neighbourhood working can play is that there is no one clear understanding of what neighbourhood working is, what it does and over what scale it operates. Lowndes and Sullivan (2008, p62) define a neighbourhood approach as a set of "*arrangements for collective decision making and/or service delivery at the sub-local level.*" This implies the transfer of political and/or managerial authority (note that it may be one or both) from 'higher' to 'lower' level actors. However, as they point out "*who gains power and over what depends upon the purpose and design of devolution*". (Lowndes and Sullivan 2008,p62). White et al. (2006, p12) imply a stronger emphasis on decision making than delivery when they describe neighbourhood working as:

> the practices and arrangements at a neighbourhood level that: provide leadership, develop shared values and a shared vision, for an area; exert influence over decisions that affect an area take decisions about an area; monitor both the execution and the impact of decisions; and recognise the development of local institutions and processes that are responsible for making decisions and allocating resources locally..

Both these sets of authors, and others (for example Power 2004, Young Foundation 2005, Richardson, 2008) point to difficulties in defining the spatial scale of a neighbourhood. Lowndes and Sullivan (2008, p62) suggest that "*'neighbourhood' is not an objective category: consequently, the idea of the 'sub-local' is a relative concept, referring to an area smaller than the local authority boundary, though such areas may contain 1,000 residents or 10,000*" while White et al. (2006) say that the definition of a neighbourhood is relatively broad, will vary according to locality, and should be locally defined to offer a viable neighbourhood in terms of ensuring sustainable governance arrangements.

Arguably, the most appropriate size, scale and organisational set up for neighbourhood working should be determined by its aims and purposes. What is neighbourhood working trying to achieve? Lowndes and Sullivan (2008), examining the 'turn to neighbourhood' under New Labour, identified four different rationales for neighbourhood working, civic; economic; political; and social, with concomitant

'ideal' institutional forms and citizen roles (Table 1). The civic rationale emphasises community action and empowerment ("what we can do for ourselves"); the economic is concerned with more efficient service delivery through shared services and effective problem identification; the political is concerned with transparency, accessibility and accountability, giving citizens more say over services; and the social with making sure that services are designed around citizens' needs, rather than bureaucratic needs. Revisiting Lowndes and Sullivan's work at this political moment is particularly illuminating. Clearly all these rationales were evident not only within New Labour policy but within the pronouncements of the new government, and in Table 1 we have extended Lowndes and Sullivan's analysis to show the links to Coalition policy.

Of course, when articulating the aims of their work, many practitioners make a case for all four rationales, arguing that they are complementary. In theory, this is an easy argument to construct: being closer to citizens (civic rationale) enhances their empowerment and makes them more likely to participate in democratic processes (political rationale), as well as providing intelligence with which to re-design holistic citizen-centred services (social rationale). A different relationship with citizens can contribute to behaviour change which leads to reduced demand for services (economic rationale) as citizens generate more self-help (civic rationale). Changed behaviour on the part of citizen is mirrored by fundamental organisational and cultural transformation by public sector institutions, putting the citizen or user at the heart of services and working across agencies (social rationale). Re-designed services with more intelligent and less demanding consumers are then more effective and therefore efficient (economic rationale). Local politicians (political rationale) are placed firmly in the lead of these significant shifts in relationships between citizen and state.

Table 1: A Typology of Neighbourhood Working

Rationale	Civic	Economic	Political	Social
	Opportunities for direct citizen participation and community action	Focus on efficiency and effectiveness gains in local service delivery; tax/spend bargain	Improvements in accessibility, accountability and responsiveness of decision making. Enhanced role and greater control and leadership for local politicians	Holistic and citizen centred approach to delivering services; designing services around citizen
Comparable typology[2]	Self-reliance: DIY community action	More market: business-led approach	n/a	More state: strengthen welfare and reduce inequality
Form of democracy	Participatory democracy	Market democracy	Representative democracy	Stakeholder democracy
Institutional design	Neighbourhood empowerment	Neighbourhood management	Neighbourhood working	Neighbourhood partnerships
Citizen role	Citizen: voice, co-production	Consumer: choice, reducing own demands on consumption	Elector: vote	Partner: loyalty, problem solving, 'intelligent user'
Link to Coalition policy	'Big Society' in the form of volunteering, community organisers, and service ownership and delivery	Comprehensive Spending Review, Community Budget pilots, Local delivery as a way to cut out the waste of large bureaucracies	Focus on leadership by local politicians Localism, Transparency, 'upwards accountability', elected police commissioners	Community Budget pilots Local people being able to get the services they need rather than "one size fits all"

Note: Adapted from Lowndes and Sullivan (2008) and Durose and Richardson (2009).

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2   Syrett and North (2008).

The New Labour administration (White et al, 2006) rejected any dichotomy between service improvement (social and economic rationales) and community involvement (civic rationale) as false, arguing that most neighbourhood partnerships are concerned with both in practice. Policy thinking by the Coalition also seems to go along these lines. The Localism Bill (HM Government, 2010) announces six intertwined actions to move from Big Government to the Big Society. The first two focus on civic rationales: 'empowering communities to do things their way' and 'lifting the burden of bureaucracy' so that they can. Others focus on service efficiency (economic rationale) and service design (social rationale). The government argues that 'the supply of services needs to be diversified' because large monopolies cannot deliver efficient services nor ones which are sufficiently locally tailored However, it sees citizen involvement in running these services (civic rationale) as a key way of diversifying services – these are seen as entirely compatible objectives. The remaining three principles -'increase local control of public finance', 'open up government to public scrutiny' and 'strengthen accountability to local people' – appear to rest on a political rationale, although it is also evident that devolving financial control is intended to support citizen involvement (civic) and enable citizens to design services around their needs (social), and that more accountable governmental structures should encourage participation (civic) and lead to better (social) and more efficient (economic) services.

However, there are also many reasons to suspect that achieving these mutually complementary aims is extremely challenging, and requires very different operational and governance structures and scales of operation. The prosaic truth is that the pressures of delivering public services in complex situations, like neighbourhoods, often forces those engaged in it to narrow their focus on particular sets of goals, at the expense of other functions. The political realities which underlie this work may also work against an ideal world situation of all four rationales being equally present. Political ideologies favour some approaches over others. The strength of political control in local public administration may determine how far a councillor-led political rationale or an officer-led social rationale is dominant. 'Old' models of paternalistic mono-government left little space for the citizen, but even new forms of network governance have been dominated by a technocratic agenda rather than citizen perspectives (Durose, Greasley and Richardson, 2009).

To explore how these tensions play out in practice, we now turn to some real examples of existing neighbourhood structures, to see how well they have balanced the four rationales in practice, and why.

3.   Case Studies

The paper principally draws on a study of neighbourhood working in three European cities: Liverpool, Roubaix, and Rotterdam, which was undertaken by research teams within ECORYS during 2009. The study originated in ECORYS' interest in processes of urban regeneration, and was designed to explore how neighbourhood structures

were designed and how they worked in disadvantaged urban areas in different countries. England, France and the Netherlands were included in the study because in all three cases central governments have targeted specific neighbourhoods with urban regeneration policies, giving rise to neighbourhood structures, and also provided additional resources to encourage community empowerment. We have already described recent policy in England. In France comparable approaches have included designation of 751 Unstable Urban Areas (the ZUS) in 1996, fifty Major Urban Projects (GPVs), and more recently the development of Contracts for Social Cohesion (CUCS), covering 2,200 neighbourhoods, and the Residents' Participation Fund, through which small budgets of €5,000 are allocated to community associations via a straightforward and accessible application process. The Netherlands has a targeted urban regeneration programme (including the Big Cities Policy, Integrated Budgets for Urban Renewal and most recently the'40 Neighbourhoods Programme)' which also includes a Residents' Budget scheme.

In each country, one city was chosen, with the aim of including cities which were similar in their social and economic characteristics, including histories of industrial decline and regeneration and concentrations of poverty, so that the implementation of different policy approaches could be examined across similar settings (see Appendix 1 for further details). Within each city one neighbourhood was selected for detailed examination (again based upon a combination of indices of deprivation and also the presence of active (and often overlapping) neighbourhood interventions. The selected neighbourhoods are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Case studies

Country	City	Neighbourhood
England	Liverpool	Alt Valley
France	Roubaix	Quartier Ouest
Netherlands	Rotterdam	Delfshaven

In each case, desk research was conducted including a review of academic literature and other national country studies, city and neighbourhood strategies and action plans, local monitoring data, and national and local statistics. Researchers in each country also conducted up to twenty semi-structured interviews with stakeholders involved in neighbourhood working, based around a common topic guide covering the extent, nature and contributions of neighbourhood working, including its key strengths and weaknesses as a concept. These included regional and city government officers, neighbourhood management officers and representatives, and public, private and voluntary sector delivery organisations active in each neighbourhood, for example housing associations and the police. Contacts were identified initially via city governments, and then snowball techniques, to ensure a broad coverage across different sectors of public policy (employment, environment etc). The resources available to the project did not permit systematic engagement with residents in any

way, although representatives of community-led organisations such as development trusts were interviewed.

The research findings were written up as an internal report by ECORYS researchers and the case study material has subsequently been re-analysed for this paper by the current team of authors. At some points in the paper, we also draw case study evidence from a further Ecorys study the Local Research Project (LRP) for the national evaluation of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal in England (Communities and Local Government (CLG), 2010a[3]). The LRP's case studies covered eighteen deprived neighbourhoods in England in receipt of the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF), and three deprived neighbourhoods without NRF. The research utilised a combination of statistical analysis and primary qualitative research, incorporating over seven hundred interviews with regional and local stakeholders and thirty-six resident focus groups.

The value of the case study approach is that it enables an in-depth understanding of the issues and processes that arise in particular contexts, as seen through the eyes of participants with different perspectives. Using multiple cases not only adds more observations but enables us to identify similarities and differences in process and outcome when key contextual variables differ – in this case, national political and institutional frameworks, histories and cultures.

In particular, a key difference between England and the other countries in this study is that in both other countries, neighbourhood governance arrangements have been mandated by law, rather than merely being encouraged by central government. France's Loi Vaillant of 2003 required local government to designate and establish Neighbourhood Councils in all cities with a population of over 80,000, to provide residents with a voice in local policy making and a resident feedback mechanism for city government. In the Netherlands, Amsterdam and Rotterdam are unique in having an additional tier of sub-city government in the form of City-District Councils (each covering around 40-70,000 residents), which are required by national law and which hold their own elections and have statutory responsibilities for devolved service delivery (predominantly social and housing policy), supported by a sizeable bureaucracy. In England, local authorities can determine their own local substructures, or not.

Central-local relationships also differ. Although in all three case study countries, national government remains a key source of finance for local government, the nature of the relationship with local government differs greatly. In England, local government has been the subject of increasing scrutiny and control by central government since the 1980s. Although there have been moves recently to expand the role and responsibilities of local authorities, and greatly reduce central regulation and inspection, local priorities therefore remain heavily driven by centrally determined

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3   Research was undertaken by ECORYS, formerly ECOTEC Research and Consulting, between 2006 and 2008 (ECOTEC, 2009; CLG, 2010a). The LRP aimed to assess the impact and outcomes of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR) through in-depth case study research, and supported the overall national evaluation (CLG, 2010b).

political agendas and funding regimes. In France, there is much greater emphasis on the role of local government and on the state in general, as a 'guardian of the public interest'. In contrast to England, the trend in France over recent years has been for greater political decentralisation. The status of the state in French society as a guardian of the general interest, and of the communes as the most democratic level of government, leads to a high level of involvement of locally elected members, in contrast to the English system (Smith, Lepine and Taylor, 2007). The Dutch model is similarly based on the principle of municipal autonomy; over the past few decades, the competencies of the national government have been increasingly decentralised to lower tiers of government following the period of post-war reconstruction, mirroring the trends seen in France. Local governments are free to decide on how to spend their municipal funds, derived from national tax revenues. The most influential layer of governance in relation to urban renewal is the city council (as well as district councils in Amsterdam and Rotterdam), which execute their policies (almost) independently from the national government.

In other words, what we attempt to do via these case studies is to explore neighbourhood working at ground level in different settings, covering questions like:
➢ What different structures have evolved and why?
➢ What rationales have given rise to different structures?
➢ How well have the arrangements delivered on the different objectives for neighbourhood working?
➢ Are the objectives compatible in practice?
➢ What, in practice, makes it more or less likely that objectives will be achieved?
➢ Why are things possible in some settings but not others? In particular, how have the different policy approaches and central-local relations in different countries led to different outcomes?

Considering these questions leads us to be able to reflect on the ways in which existing and new neighbourhood structures might support the UK government's new policy objectives.

An important point to note is that, because of the origins of the study, all the areas are relatively disadvantaged. In the context of the Big Society agenda, an important question is whether different structures are a) necessary and b) possible in more socio-economically advantaged areas. This is a question that we cannot examine directly using our empirical data.

4. Neighbourhood Working and its Rationales in the Case Study Cities and Neighbourhoods

Liverpool (Alt Valley)
Liverpool established its neighbourhood management programme in 2007, as a local response to both NSNR (and co-ordination with other regeneration programmes such as Objective 1 European Regional Development Funding) and New Labour's political

devolution agenda. At the time of our research, the city was divided into five Neighbourhood Management Areas (NMAs) each covering six electoral wards and 90-100,000 residents, and having a team of around ten staff. We focused particularly on one NMA, Alt Valley.

Across the city, the main decision making bodies in the NMAs were District Committees, which met quarterly and included senior public sector managers and elected Councillors. Their primary responsibilities included developing neighbourhood plans and improving neighbourhood service delivery, as well as allocating a budget of £100,000-200,000 to fund additional local projects. Councillors also chaired Neighbourhood Partnership Working Groups (NPWGs), made up of paid workers from agencies delivering public services and local authority officers, to develop and monitor actions within their respective themes. Below these, 'Task and Finish' groups were convened to carry out particular projects.

Interviews and documentary evidence suggest that social rationale was a particularly strong driving force behind Liverpool's approach. NMAs aimed to deliver services at a local level that matched each area's needs, covering housing, health, jobs, skills and training, safety and including through joint work with other local authorities and government agencies to tackle wider social problems, and through community involvement[4]. The large scale of the neighbourhood management areas, much larger than those conceived by Lowndes and Sullivan (2008), was therefore designed to match an appropriate scale for service delivery. Liverpool City Council officers reported that Neighbourhood Management has since provided a framework for the devolution of some local authority services including sport, recreation and environmental services to the neighbourhood level, and for joint working around other services such as public health and employment. In Alt Valley, this joint working (and the additional funding stream to support it) had enabled the development of small-scale community safety and environmental projects (including a witness and victim support programme and community garden), as detailed in the area's Neighbourhood Agreement for 2007-10. The Neighbourhood Manager also reported that it has enabled linkage between neighbourhood residents and city wide programmes (for example through facilitating the involvement of residents in a city-wide regeneration agency's local housing project, and the development of a 'health year' for residents). To a certain extent, political and economic rationales were also evident. Local councillors were given a prominent role in leading District Committees and working groups, and interviewees from the neighbourhood management team argued that costs saving could be made in service delivery by joint working between agencies, although in practice it was hard to evidence this.

Civic engagement was undoubtedly one objective of neighbourhood management in Liverpool. However it was less prominent than other rationales. Residents were engaged through three key mechanisms: regular consultation events, known as 'Your Community Matters', with a strong input from local Councillors around the design of

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4   Liverpool City Council briefing note, 21 November 2008

these events; customer research through household surveys, use of newsletters and directly through individual service providers; and via residents' elected representatives tasked with feeding their constituents' concerns up to the NPWGs. This was primarily a representative democracy model, serving the political rationale, with an emphasis on consultation to ensure that services were designed around community needs (a reflection of the social rationale). According to interviewees, these arrangements were also partly a result of the recent history of community involvement in Liverpool, which had been significantly influenced by the availability of European 'Objective 1' funding. A condition of this funding was the establishment of dedicated area-based partnerships with guaranteed seats (and votes) for community representatives. Some service providers remarked that some of the stakeholders involved in the partnerships had been overtly political and obstructive and questioned how representative they were of wider community views. They doubted that residents were able to contribute meaningfully to debate at a strategic level and according to some interviewees it was to avoid these same difficulties that the City Council had moved to a politician-led and consultative model for Neighbourhood Management. Community representatives in the research however, including a local development trust, felt somewhat disempowered by this shift in models of engagement.

Interestingly, since our research took place, there has been a shift of policy and approach. In May 2010, Liverpool had a shift in political control, and has also been working on how to make significant budget savings. Already, some services have been re-centralised including environmental maintenance, and the Neighbourhood Management Teams have been reduced in size. Looking ahead, it seems likely that Liverpool's Neighbourhood Management will move towards more of an enabling role, focusing on co-ordination rather than direct service delivery, with the District Committees or 'mini LSPs' supported by existing service staff working together at the neighbourhood level, rather than dedicated workers. Buy-in at the executive director level is currently secured through the nomination of 'Devolution Champions'. Whilst a reflection of wider reductions in public sector budgets, this may also be in recognition of the limited progress made on the economic rationale for neighbourhood governance (or at least on evidencing real value for money benefits).

Roubaix (Neighbourhood West)
Roubaix's structure was one of Neighbourhood Councils (prescribed by statute as described above). According to the city government, these were on a much smaller scale than Liverpool's NMAs, serving approximately 20,000 residents each. The Neighbourhood Councils were led by the Neighbourhood Mayor, an existing elected politician. They met bi-monthly and consisted of 80 members, of whom half were residents. As in Liverpool, they were supported by 10-15 permanent staff, including, in Neighbourhood West's case, a Director, responsible for running the office; the neighbourhood Project Manager who supervised the implementation of the 'Politique de la Ville'[5] projects in the neighbourhood and coordinated the different actors

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5   The French neighbourhood renewal programme commonly named 'Politique de la Ville' was launched in the late 1970s.

involved; and the 'Cadre de Vie' Technician (community life technician) who dealt with daily contact with residents, coordinates local services (e.g. parking, cleanliness), and supported partnership initiatives. The latter officer also managed an annual budget of Euro 100,000 to spend on micro-urban renewal projects, in partnership with the local authority.

With their focus on engaging residents and officers in democratic debate (particularly around strategy and local services), but without investing significant decision making power amongst the residents themselves, the approach and institutional design of Roubaix's structure reflects most closely the political rationale for neighbourhood working within the Lowndes and Sullivan typology. According to one elected representative, it offered a way to "renew the relation between the residents and the elected representatives". Indeed the political workings of the Neighbourhood Council have been an issue of active debate.

The city council reported that changes had to be made to the Neighbourhood Councils in 2008 following accusations of demagogic behaviour by Neighbourhood Mayors, an over-representation of some groups, and the subsequent loss of other members. It was argued that Neighbourhood Mayors had not properly fulfilled their functions and instead acted as isolated actors, appropriating issues for their own benefit instead of acting in the general interest. Quotas were introduced to help diversify membership, and include professionals and representative organisations alongside residents.

Roubaix's neighbourhood management arrangements were ostensibly stronger than Liverpool's in terms of civic involvement both because of the smaller scale of the neighbourhoods and because pre-existing structures for resident empowerment were maintained under new arrangements. Roubaix also had a system of Neighbourhood Committees which pre-dated Neighbourhood Councils, having been created through a popular residents' movement in the 1970s. They had 15-20 permanent members, were represented on the Neighbourhood Councils, and were each supported by one full-time employee, who provides advice and guidance to local residents (this reported to have helped make local services more accessible). Neighbourhood Councils were involved in the management of the Residents' Participation Fund, allocated by the region and the city to fund community involvement and cohesion building projects at the neighbourhood level, and then "*managed by, with and for residents*".

There has been some progress on addressing neighbourhood social issues e.g. through the renovation of a playground, traffic management and pedestrianisation studies, and most notably through conducting an environmental diagnostic, which influenced other Neighbourhood Committees and the city council to tender in cooperation with neighbouring cities for the creation of a green corridor (the 'Ecologic Corridor', worth more than a million Euros). However, it was also felt by national government agencies that such examples of significant influence were rare: the Residents' Participation Fund was said to mainly fund "*ephemeral and not very sustainable projects*". A lack of substantial economic rationale is illustrated by the fact that Neighbourhood Councils and Committees are primarily concerned with resident engagement, debate

and proposals for additional services, as opposed to substantive service remodelling or supporting efficiencies within existing services:

"*Decisions are taken between the Government and the city council… Neighbourhood Councils are there for exchange and the organisation of local events*" (housing agency manager).

Rotterdam (Delfshaven),

Rotterdam had the most extensive devolution of the three cities at the time of the research. The city was divided into four City-Districts (including Delfshaven), each covering a number of sub-neighbourhoods and totalling around 70,000 residents. In contrast to the other case studies, the City-Districts in Rotterdam had a substantial delegated budget (circa Euro 30 million per annum), responsibility for management of national regeneration budgets for their districts (including 40 Neighbourhoods Funding) and officer complements of around 300 staff for each City District. District policy programmes and budgets were negotiated with the city government, to reflect national and city policies and agreed output measures. In this sense, Rotterdam's City-District Councils would appear to most closely align with the economic rationale for neighbourhood working, with their focus on ensuring more efficient and effective service delivery. City-District goals were delivered through direct service delivery, commissioning of services, and partnership agreements reached through consensus on the basis of reciprocity and mutual dependence.

The Dutch example was reported by local and national urban officials to have been particularly successful in facilitating more localised delivery of a range of social, community safety, and housing services, including in Delfshaven developing 'public space behaviour rules', commissioning local employment and youth services, bringing local housing associations together to develop a neighbourhood action plan, renovating derelict homes in partnership with residents, and in general terms ensuring that national regeneration programmes were channelled towards tackling neighbourhood priorities. Contractors and other delivery partners could be engaged and monitored at a more local level. Low income neighbourhoods such as Delfshaven have experienced significant increases in neighbourhood satisfaction and safety over the period of intervention. Services more efficiently dealt with at a higher level were managed by Rotterdam City Council.

Delfshaven City-District Council could also be seen to be offering an opportunity to strengthen democratic accountability, and hence also aligns with the political rationale. The city district or Deelgemeenten (sub-municipalities) were the lowest administrative level in the municipality and were democratically elected, with policy implemented by the district-mayor (voorzitter) and the district-aldermen. However, the independence of the City District Council was limited, as they needed to formalize an official management agreement (bestuursakkoord) with the city council. The city district acted a local extension of the government of the municipality of Rotterdam, with responsibility for social cohesion, public space, local government services and similar issues.

Residents had no formal role in Delfshaven City-District decision-making, although they were involved indirectly as voters and directly through consultation on specific developments and issues (whether through resident participation platforms organised by the City-District government or through day to day contact with housing corporation employees and neighbourhood police officers). City-District Councils in Rotterdam had also used their allocation of the Neighbourhood and Resident Budgets to develop more innovative public participation through 'Delfshaven Duiten'. Every resident in the neighbourhood was given a token representing a small monetary value, five times a year, and encouraged to group together with other residents in order to commission additional projects and activities to benefit the neighbourhood from this relatively modest additional fund. However, there was no direct participation in decisions about other more significant investment or policy.

One successful civic activity in Rotterdam was an initiative known as Opzoomeren. This was initiated by local residents in Rotterdam West to enliven their neighbourhood to improve safety, amenity, and 'gezelligheid' (cosiness) in the neighbourhood by organising street activities, such as small street festivals, neighbourhood clean-ups and flower planting. The initiative was later co-opted by the municipality which opened an Opzoomer-office and subsidizes various activities. At the time of the research, the programme was city-wide, with paid neighbourhood co-ordinators, and was funded by the city government; 18 per cent of all Rotterdam citizens participated in Opzoomeren activities.

Summary
Table 3 summarises key elements of neighbourhood working in the three case study cities in relation to the typology presented in Table 1.

This overview suggests that in each case, neighbourhood structures were driven by a number of different rationales – there was no case where only one objective dominated. However, the emphasis was different in each case, with more emphasis on the social rationale in Liverpool, political in Roubaix and economic in Rotterdam.

Economic and social rationales were closely related, since economies in service delivery from joint working and partnership working to fit services more closely to residents' needs were often seen as two sides of the same coin. Table 4 produces a very simple summary, with the number of crosses indicating the strength of the rationale in each case.

Table 3: Case Studies considered in relation to the Neighbourhood Rationales

	Alt Valley, Liverpool, England	Neighbourhood West, Roubaix, France	Delfshaven, Rotterdam, Netherlands
Civic	● Your Community Matters consultation ● Project specific resident involvement (e.g. community gardens)	● Neighbourhood Councils – 50% individuals ● Neighbourhood committees ● Resident Participation Fund	● Neighbourhood and resident budgets ● Delfshaven Duiten –'PB' originated from City-District –'tokens' ● Opzoomeren – created by residents
Economic	● Service providers exchange data and avoid duplication of effort ● Commissioned Alt Valley Community Trust to deliver environmental services	● Neighbourhood Councils co-ordinate services in neighbourhood ● Neighbourhood Committee service desks	● City-Districts – €30 million/annum (% of city budget), more localised service delivery/policy ● Service commissioning (e.g. local job scheme) ● Bilateral agreements with partners, no sanctions for non-compliance
Political	● District committees – 90,000 population covering six Wards, defined by city council, ward councillors ● Cllrs chair NPWGs ● Neighbourhood Area Agreements link to Local authority targets	● Neighbourhood councils, led by Neighbourhood Mayors (elected members of city council)	● City-Districts –tier of local government, all councillors directly elected
Social	●Budget of £100-200,000/annum ● Neighbourhood Partnership Working Groups ● Task and Finish groups ● Witness protection scheme, Health Year, community gardens, sports, youth diversion ● Close links with neighbourhood jobs employment and training programmes	● Micro-urban renewal projects (e.g. playground renovations) ● Traffic management projects e.g. pedestrianisation ● Urban green space projects	● Strong overlap with economic ● Funnelling of national regeneration budgets to meet local needs ● Innovative homesteading and youth training and employment projects

Table 4: Rationales for Neighbourhood Working - Summary

Case studies	Alt Valley, Liverpool, England	Neighbourhood West, Roubaix, France	Delfshaven, Rotterdam, Netherlands
Civic	X	X	X
Economic	X	X	**XXX**
Political	XX	**XXX**	XX
Social	**XXX**	XX	XX
Dominant rationale	Social	Political	Economic

This is in an oversimplified presentation, but we use it to make a simple point: although all the case studies of neighbourhood working included mechanisms for civic participation and involvement, this was not the strongest rationale for neighbourhood working in any of the cases. Thus citizen participation was taking place in the context of structures that were also serving other ends: creating stronger and more accountable local political structures, enabling co-ordination of service delivery, aligning objectives and spending at local authority and neighbourhood levels, and making efficiency savings. Clearly this could also be the case more widely in the current UK context, if civic activism for the Big Society is promoted within structures that already exist for neighbourhood working, set up primarily with other goals in mind. We therefore turn to look more closely at the 'civic' elements of the case studies: how did the different structures perform in relation to their civic rationales; were they effective (or not) in engaging and activating citizens; what were the tensions and difficulties between the civic and other objectives?

The evidence from these case studies suggests that there were weaknesses in civic engagement and empowerment in all the selected neighbourhoods. Stakeholders across the case studies broadly felt that residents had played a largely consultative role within neighbourhood working structures, as opposed to direct participation in decision making, budgeting or community action, with community involvement usually heavily state-directed and circumscribed. Whilst there is an important role for consultation within the spectrum of civic engagement, this could be perceived as reactive, and unlikely to deliver the 'Big Society'. Some stakeholders talked about 'directed consultation', which was 'tokenistic' and was felt to preclude genuine community participation and empowerment.

Tensions were evident for example between Roubaix's Neighbourhood Committees and the more recently established Neighbourhood Councils, with one Committee in Neighbourhood West of the opinion that the Council did not always take their suggestions and proposed projects into consideration (the example of a proposal for an intermediate labour market project, and tackling unemployment more generally, was cited). However this issue itself was contested within the community and perspectives tended to differ by Neighbourhood Committee. Other community associations spoke highly of the engagement role of the Neighbourhood Councils:

> "In the case of the Lignons projects for example, residents intervened during one of the meetings, the architect listened to their questions and remarks and the whole project got reversed. He became interested in the people" (President of the association 'Théâtre tout Azimut').

To a certain extent, problems and tensions were a matter of gaps in community engagement practice that could easily be remedied and were not systemic. The core methods of resident engagement were on the whole conservative, with meetings the overwhelming method of choice. There had been some innovations in Liverpool, including consultation events in public areas with high footfall such as shopping centres and the use of participatory budgeting, with each ward allocated £10,000 to spend on activities or projects chosen by residents, but there remained significant room for greater experimentation with models such as e-governance, dramatic exploration and engagement with specific groups (such as young people or ethnic minorities), to reach out to those who are not always heard. In all three of the case study areas, residents' organisations and meetings tended to be attended by only a small number of highly engaged and active residents. In Delfshaven, for example, elderly residents were said to have given associations a 'stuffy' image, which had discouraged younger people and minority ethnic communities from engaging. In Roubaix there were also reports of 'class confrontation' between more mobilised and well-resourced residents and other, less well-off sections of the community. The perceived dominance of some more middle class associations within the Neighbourhood Council had led Roubaix to require minimum quotas for different types of members. In the city council, an official claimed that in the Neighbourhood 'Ouest' (West) there is no room for the 'little people'. Overall, the evidence suggests that there is room for improvement, particularly in terms of accountability to residents' inputs and feedback, and to the diversity of the community. It is not easy to mobilise a Big Society on a consistent basis through representative or consultative structures.

However, weaknesses in relation to "the civic" partly reflected the need for neighbourhood working to meet other objectives. There were inherent tensions between delivering social, economic and/or political rationales and the civic rationale. A key issue was scale, or 'territorial coherence'. The main state-led vehicles – District Committees, Neighbourhood Councils and City-Districts – all covered areas identified and defined by their respective city councils. These areas contained a number of much smaller areas that residents identified more strongly with – those which, in reality,

residents considered their 'neighbourhoods'. Notably, the resident-led Neighbourhood Committees in Roubaix aligned closely to Neighbourhood West's traditional industrial neighbourhoods. In Roubaix and Liverpool this had been countered somewhat by organising resident engagement at a sub-district, neighbourhood level (with the interaction of Neighbourhood Councils and the smaller scale, resident-led Neighbourhood Committees in Roubaix considered particularly successful), although equally this also added to the complexity of local governance, which can be problematic for citizen engagement and also democratic renewal.

Neighbourhood structures and the community had also had to contend with the reality of changing political agendas (and short-termism) at the city level, as described by one neighbourhood stakeholder from Delfshaven in Rotterdam:

> 'I've been explaining this now to the local government for the 3rd time in 3 years…there is no consistency in people, ideas, no awareness of local networks, just no consistency at all. Each government seems to want to start all over again. I have sincere doubts about any effectiveness or efficiency in local policies and implementation plans'.

Another key issue was accountability. Civic renewal through direct citizen participation sat uneasily with more formal representative democratic processes designed to revitalise local democracy and local political leadership, or partnership models where diverse service providers worked together to meet citizens' needs. This generated frustrations on both sides. Tensions existed between politicians and residents' bodies that were not anticipated or well managed. In Roubaix, some Neighbourhood Mayors were reported to have not properly performed their role, with attempts to dominate proceedings leading to disillusionment and disengagement among stakeholders. There were also tensions between the existing Neighbourhood Committees and the Neighbourhood Councils created by the Loi Vaillant in 2003. The Committees quickly felt threatened and de-legitimised by these new governance bodies, which covered a larger area and had significantly higher budgets, and there have since been several debates over roles and legitimacy between the two bodies. Within Neighbourhood West, one Neighbourhood Committee tended to have a cooperative approach with the Neighbourhood Council, while the other admitted to be constantly in conflict with the Neighbourhood Council: '*We attack and threaten the Council, we even go to court. We work together for the sake of residents*'. The city council seemed to have been ill-prepared for managing these tensions, saying that: '*nobody had imagined that the existence of Neighbourhood Committees and Councils would imply a shift in the decision making process. We have a direct suffrage and elected representatives have the right to the take decisions. We ask residents to give their opinion and co-produce in some cases*'.

In Alt Valley also the emphasis on local political leadership seemed to work at odds with a 'bottom up' approach. For example the 'Your Community Matters' events were commissioned by the City Council, and its elected members had a strong influence over the format and content of events. The City Council's view that ward councillors should act as community champions was challenged by voluntary sector

representatives, some of whom felt that low voter turnouts, a lack of alternative candidates in some areas and the fact that not all councillors worked or lived in the communities they represented weakened their legitimacy. Meetings provided opportunities for members of the public to engage with service providers in person, provide information about neighbourhood issues, and identify their own priorities for action. However communication of these issues upwards was dependent upon individual service providers and Councillors and them acting effectively as 'champions'.

5.   Discussion and Conclusions: Delivering the Big Society - 'Popular' and 'Invited' Neighbourhood Spaces

The policy pronouncements of the new Government around the twin flagship aims of the 'Big Society' and localism seem to be strongly supportive of the various rationales for neighbourhood working aiming to ensure responsiveness, to offer direct, local support to nascent community activity, and to coordinate community-run services. On this basis, one might expect to see a period of expansion and perhaps embedding of neighbourhood working activities and structures in the months ahead.

Yet the evidence presented in our case studies questions and challenges the effectiveness of neighbourhood structures in achieving the 'civic' objectives associated with the Big Society. This evidence supports the findings of previous research (for example, Durose and Richardson, 2009) that has indicated that in practice the civic is neglected in neighbourhood working, overwhelmed by the demands of the other rationales. This evidence points to an unacknowledged tension within current UK government policy. Devolution to and within local authorities (i.e. to local rather than central authorities) does not necessarily result in, and can thwart, community activism and empowerment (giving power to local communities rather than local authorities).

Nonetheless, there were also examples within the case studies of neighbourhood initiatives which had successfully promoted community involvement. Despite the difficulties Roubaix's Neighbourhood Committees and associated Residents' Participation Fund, the Dutch Neighbourhood and Resident Budgets, and Opzoomeren's neighbourhood workers all did promote active community involvement. In the latter case, state support had helped to build on and extend community action, making the Big Society bigger. The partial incorporation of civic action in these examples helped the community's voice to be heard when major decisions were being taken which affected their neighbourhood, ensured that national funding for empowerment reached residents and community groups, and provided arenas for diverse and competing interests to be reconciled or moderated.

In thinking through how to reconcile the existing structures for neighbourhood working with the aspiration of the 'Big Society', Lowndes and Sullivan (2008) provide another useful heuristic for understanding neighbourhood working in

differentiating between 'invited' and 'popular' spaces. 'Invited' spaces are structures and vehicles for neighbourhood working created by the states whereas 'popular' spaces are created outside of conventional political systems and structures. It follows that 'invited' spaces may be less effective in delivering 'civic' objectives as they are driven 'top down' whereas popular spaces are developed by citizens 'bottom up'.

The central-local relations in each of three main governance models identified in the case studies are clear examples of 'invited' spaces: the District Committees and their associated thematic partnerships, established by Liverpool City Council; the Neighbourhood Councils, required by national law and defined by Roubaix City Council, and of course the Dutch City-Districts, which in themselves constitute an additional tier of local government. The Opzoomeren and the Roubaix Neighbourhood Committees are examples of popular spaces. The evidence suggests that invited spaces set up to manage services and deliver economies of scale may well be predisposed towards engaging with larger numbers of residents to achieve purely informative and consultative goals. They may also be considered insufficiently independent by community parties, particularly private companies and residents with which they may be seeking to engage, leading to limited involvement. Some level of independence and autonomy from any one public sector agency/service provider is required to best deliver the civic rationale.

The Coalition Government's aspirations for the 'Big Society' whilst having neighbourhood working at their core, seem to imply a necessary shift in the type of neighbourhood structures and arrangements towards 'popular' spaces. Whilst popular spaces on the other hand may offer the best potential for delivering civic renewal they may be insufficiently strategic (in focus and scale) to help deliver wider social and economic objectives and they may lack legitimacy in the eyes of local government. Increased community control can also bring with it an increased risk that decisions and services will become mismanaged or politicised, and that conflicts will occur. It is said that community engagement is more likely to be effective in relatively homogenous communities with shared values and beliefs, and a strong sense of belonging and understanding built up over time (Woodin et al 2010). Where groups with different interests are not prepared to compromise, there is the potential for increased tension between ethnic and social groups (James, 2006, Young Foundation, 2005). The proliferation of small community groups running public services can enable consumer choice and holistic localised delivery. However, such organisations and partnerships are often, by design, outside formal democratic control. Their proliferation can work against formal democratic accountability and the ability of elected organisations to respond to community concerns. There also remains a substantive question about the interest and appetite for the 'Big Society' from communities and citizens. We are by no means certain either that proliferation will occur or that successful modes of neighbourhood working, effectively achieving the stated civic objectives, will arise from the Coalition's approach.

Indeed, other evidence has shown that, particularly for disadvantaged areas, the level and quality of 'popular' civic action is enhanced by the presence of 'invited'

structures of neighbourhood working. The Local Research Project (CLG, 2010a) investigated the impact of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal across twenty-one of the most deprived neighbourhoods in England. It found that deprived neighbourhoods with effective systems of neighbourhood working were more likely to have resident participation in decision making and service delivery, and as a consequence more likely to have benefited from improved and often innovative services and projects nested within their neighbourhoods. Examples include Bolton's Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder and its recruitment of younger and older volunteers to explore the service needs of local residents, as well as the employment of local people to help fellow residents access jobs; Hastings' Community Forums and their role in organising resident-led neighbourhood festivals to boost community cohesion and spirit; Sheffield's development trusts, instrumental in involving local people in small-scale environmental projects and accessing contracts to deliver public services; and Knowsley Housing Trust's (KHT's) engagement with local residents to inform the remodelling of one of their major housing estates. Within those neighbourhoods where effective 'invited' neighbourhood working structures or processes were absent, there were fewer opportunities for residents to engage in civic and social action and perceptions of place and local services tended to be more negative.

There is an unresolved contradiction in UK government policy which arises here. The Big Society is posed as a liberating alternative to big government, while in fact in some circumstances promoting the Big Society may require an expansion of local government support structures. Cox and Schmuecker (2010) have also shown that even when established, community and social enterprises tend to rely heavily on government grant and support. In other words, civic engagement can be (and perhaps must be) facilitated and provided ongoing support by local governmental structures if it is to thrive.

The approach to neighbourhood working in the Big Society seems to be explicitly moving away from targeted interventions in the most deprived neighbourhoods, towards the neighbourhood as a space for civic activity, not only having a say in decision making and service design, but taking an active role in delivering those services. Some communities are more ready for Big Society versions of neighbourhood working than others. Some will not ever have the resources or capacity to sustain community-run activities and services, and, on the strength of the evidence above, can significantly benefit from investment in capacity-building or catalytic structures such as neighbourhood forums, partnerships, or management organisations, be they an arm of the state or independent civic body, such as a development trust. The move to the 'Big Society' also comes at a time when the funds to support capacity building and neighbourhood management and support workers (for example, the Working Neighbourhoods Fund) are being withdrawn as the government attempts to reduce the country's deficit through public spending cuts. A further difficulty is that civic participation is almost inevitably stimulated by specific social needs or local issues: the desire to provide a better children's playground or somewhere for young people to hang out, or to make streets safer or prevent demolition of a valued

community building, for example. The availability of public funds to apply for is a key driver of civic activity, as evidenced by both the Local Research Project and the European case studies, suggesting that participation may be more difficult to stimulate during a period of public spending restraint. For the coalition, in one sense neighbourhood working is an integral part of a Big Society, but in another it represents unnecessary and/or unaffordable aspects of big government. There is an urgent need to work out what kind of structures are needed to support greater civic participation, and where the money is going to come from.

Given these contradictions and difficulties, how should neighbourhood working move forward in the 'Big Society'? Our analysis has pointed to the need for neighbourhood working to be both 'invited' and 'popular'. Without local government buy-in and support, the sustainability of neighbourhood structures is questionable, with some organisations in England effectively left to wither on the vine following the ending of national funding. Thus popular spaces need to remain popular, but may also need support and recognition in order to remain sustainable. There is an important role for city-level government in framing and 'inviting' or enabling successful models of neighbourhood working as a strategic partner, as well as transferring practice across neighbourhoods.

The current localism agenda provides local authorities and citizens with an opportunity to re-think the relationships between civic action and political representation, but they do not offer the answers. Under an agenda of decentralisation, the establishment of neighbourhood working arrangements may be left to the local level, and local authorities may choose to have no or limited civic apparatus. Indeed, following the recent financial settlement for local government, many authorities may see civic apparatus as a peripheral luxury. Such an attitude to the wider, more strategic role which local government has to play in delivering civic objectives would be both short-termist and self-defeating. Whilst the limitations of current practice within many local authorities are clear (Durose and Richardson, 2009), local authorities need to grasp the opportunity to re-imagine the strategic role they have to play in ensuring innovation in service delivery and the well-being of the communities they serve.

Perhaps the most important conclusion to be drawn from the case studies is that that local government needs to acknowledge that there is no one harmonious or single solution to the multiple objectives of renewed local democracy, civic empowerment, and better and more efficient public services. Neighbourhood working structures and processes may be established by a wide range of bodies, from city governments through to housing providers, established regeneration organisations and residents' groups. The challenge faced by local government is to develop a strategic 'place shaping' role without being threatened by such potential allies, but rather learning from them to reconstitute 'invited' spaces and facilitate 'popular' spaces for neighbourhood working.

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Appendix 1: City and Neighbourhood Backgrounds

City Backgrounds
Post-industrial cities
All three cities have been shaped by their industrial heritage, experiencing socio-economic decline in the second half of the 20th century. All three have made significant efforts on urban revitalisation in the last 30 years, with some signs of recovery.

Liverpool is a former industrial and port city in England's North West region. It experienced rapid economic and social decline during the 1980s and 1990s following the decline of its traditional manufacturing industries. Since the mid-1990s there have been efforts to create an urban renaissance, with redevelopment of its docklands area as a regional hub for culture, retail and leisure. The city has been a recipient of mulitple European and national government regeneration schemes. Rising prosperity in Liverpool's inner-city district has not been matched by conditions in many outer urban areas, where worklessness and social deprivation remain pervasive.

At the start of the First World War, Roubaix in northern France was the second region for the textile industry after Lancaster in the UK. The decline of its competitive positive in the textile markets created social and economic difficulties for Roubaix. In 1983, the Centrists came to power with the aim to give a new image to the city with extensive investment in the city centre. A master plan (Schema Directeur) for the wider metropolitan area (the Lille Metropole) was launched in the early 1990s following the principles of the 'renewed city' (Ville Renouvelée)[6], and including the investments in the centre of Roubaix.

Like Liverpool, Rotterdam is a port city in the west of the country which still faces some serious structural problems and pressing urban challenges. The Netherlands second largest city has historically been a working class city with jobs in the port and related industries such as petrochemicals, warehousing, logistics and wholesale. In the 1950s the city was one of the world largest ports, attracting migrant labour within the Netherlands, and in the 1970s, large numbers of 'guest labourers' from Turkey and Morocco. Rotterdam was one of the nine Dutch cities that received European Objective 2 funds. Investment programmes are underway to increase economic development, educational attainment, community safety, employment levels, average incomes, and Rotterdammers who speak the Dutch language.

History of left-wing politics
Common to all three is a history of leftist politics and militancy. For example, the early 1980s saw the dominant political party in Liverpool - the Labour Party - dominated by a socialist grouping, the Militant Tendency, later to become

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6   The'Ville renouvelée' refers to principles developed in the 1980s aiming at planning cities in a sustainable way through containing urban sprawl and prioritising the densification of cities and'soft' mobility.

independent of the Labour party and form the Socialist Party. Roubaix has been described as a 'Mecca for Socialism'. Socialists governed the city almost continually from 1892 until 1983. A successful coexistence between a strong leftist political movement and the conservative and catholic 'Patronat' (employers) is very specific to Roubaix. Until the end of the 1990s, Rotterdam was dominated by the Labour Party (PvdA), extremely statist and protective of labour. However, in 2001 the more populist Liveable Rotterdam party rose to prominence, partly on a platform of tackling problems associated with immigration, to become the single biggest party in the city until 2010.

Neighbourhood Backgrounds
All three neighbourhoods are areas of concentrated deprivation. Alt Valley is one of five Neighbourhood Management Areas (NMAs) created by Liverpool City Council in 2007. With a population of around 90,000, it made up of six electoral wards, which then have sub-neighbourhoods within them. Alt Valley has one of Liverpool's largest employment and industrial zones located along a Strategic Investment Area, which has been prioritised for growth. However, the neighbourhood exhibits high levels of deprivation in some areas, with residents having relatively low skills and incomes and their children performing poorly at school; there are also above average levels of unoccupied housing and high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour. It has been allocated central government funding based on its deprivation rankings.

Neighbourhood West (Quartier Ouest), Roubiax, is one of five neighbourhoods of Roubaix, with around 15,000 inhabitants from a population of around 100,000 in Roubiax[7]. These neighbourhoods were created in the late 1990s through the merging of 15 sub-neighbourhoods, which used to be the historical industrial cores of the city to which residents still strongly identify. Neighbourhood West contains two sub-neighbourhoods: Fresnoy-Mackellerie and Epeule Trichon. Many socio-economic indicators for neighbourhood West show high levels of deprivation compared to Roubaix and the Lille Metropolitan area.

Delfshaven is one of Rotterdam's 13 city districts, and has around 70,000 inhabitants from a population of around 590,000 in Rotterdam. There are seven 'sub-neighbourhoods' in Delfshaven. Delfshaven lags behind Rotterdam and also most urban areas in the Netherlands as a whole, scoring below average on a range of socio-economic indicators. It has been targeted by various initiatives (EU, national, and local) since 1994 for urban regeneration.

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7   Figure from 1999 data. Data not available between 2000 and 2009 (to be issued in 2010). Roubaix's population was 97,952 in 2006.