Towards a Model of Neighbourhood Belonging in Urban and Suburban Settings

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“Place and people, with the common sense limit as the area one can easily walk over”. (Morris & Hess, 1975, *Neighbourhood Power*, p. 6)

“A limited territory within a larger urban area, where people inhabit dwellings and interact socially”. (Hallman, 1984, *Neighbourhoods*, p. 13)

“... a geographically circumscribed, built environment that people use practically and symbolically”. (Blokland, 2003, *Urban Bonds*, p. 213)
# Theorising Neighbourhoods

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Globalization and Belonging - Mike Savage et al. (2005)

- Specialises Bourdieu's theory of habitus and field
- “People are comfortable when there is a correspondence between habitus and field, but otherwise people feel ill at ease and seek to move – socially and spatially – so that there discomfort is relieved”. (p. 9)
- “Within ... differentiated fields, residential space is a key arena in which respondents define their social position”. (p. 207)
- Deconstruct binary between locals/in-movers
“Elective belonging [...] implies a view of residential attachment that articulates a distinctive ethics of belonging that has nothing to do with the claims of history. It repudiates the claims of locals trapped in the past and also the transients who are here today and gone tomorrow. Rather it is premised on the values of those who come today and stay tomorrow, who make a choice to live somewhere and make a go if it”. (p. 207)
Anglo-US suburbia as a bourgeois utopia:
- ‘Pure suburb’ (Sibley, 1995) - concern with order, conformity and material affluence
- The ‘suburban aspiration’ (Clapson, 2003) – moving up and out

BUT also trouble in paradise:
- Increasing rates of suburban poverty especially in US
- Suburban sprawl - environmentally unsustainable
- Exclusionary class and radicalised processes in ‘landscapes of privilege’ (Duncan and Duncan, 2004)
- Suburbia as socially contested space
‘Eastside’ in Essex

- Essex – county to the east of London
- Thurrock - local authority area in South Essex
- Eastside – consists of 3 main parts:
  1. Village
  2. Town - dominated by post-war council housing estates and local shops
  3. Newer private estates (study areas):
     - Woodlands
     - Newtown
- Two Eastside wards in bottom fifth most deprived wards in England (2000)
Study of in-movers - homeowners who had moved to Eastside from London:

- Survey - 140 respondents
- Interviews – 42
- Interviews with estate agents – 6
- Documentary analysis
- Observation in public places

Two areas of private housing:

- **Woodlands estate (74 survey resps.+ 21 interviews)**
- Newtown estates (66 survey resps.+ 21 interviews)
Household income by estate

- Woodlands
- Newtown

- Under £20K
- £20-30K
- £30-40K
- £40-50K
- £50-60K
- £60-80K
- Over £80k
‘Professional people with lots of money and good jobs’ – the Woodlands residents

- Woodlands estate a zone of home-owning, middle-class affluence within a larger deprived working-class area (Watt, 2009)
  - Higher incomes – economic capital
  - Higher level of qualifications – cultural capital
- But what kind of middle-class neighbourhood?
  - Economic capital & cultural capital modest by standards of inner London gentrifiers
  - Majority inter-generationally upwardly mobile
  - Significant intra-generational mobility via internal promotion
  - Hence lower and middle middle-class suburbanites rather than New Middle Class gentrifiers
- Predominantly white English although few Black African professionals
Housing as symbolic display

- Woodlands’ residents more reliant upon organisational & property assets rather than cultural capital (Savage et al., 1992)
- Having greater reliance upon organisational rather than cultural assets, the Woodlanders were keen to symbolically display their economic capital:

  “middle-class positions that have been achieved in the employment field are symbolised to others via the mobilisation of economic wealth in the housing market as well as other fields of consumption” (Allen, 2008: 4).
Eastside as a bourgeois utopia

- Very high levels of housing satisfaction
- High but somewhat lower levels of area satisfaction
- Woodlands a much ‘better place’ than inner east London (Watt, 2007, 2008)
- Common origins as ‘Londoners’
- Diasporic recreation of East London family & kinship in South Essex
Satisfaction with house by estate

- **Woodlands**
  - Very satisfied: 90%
  - Fairly satisfied: 10%
  - Neither: 0%
  - Fairly dissatisfied: 0%
  - Very dissatisfied: 0%

- **Newtown**
  - Very satisfied: 80%
  - Fairly satisfied: 20%
  - Neither: 0%
  - Fairly dissatisfied: 0%
  - Very dissatisfied: 0%
Satisfaction with area by area of origin & estate
‘We got a lot more for our money’ - house-buying

- No preference for inner London – mixophobic reaction (Bauman, 2003) to urban diversity - not reluctant gentrifiers
- More for your money – bigger properties
- Woodlands faux-rural appeal: “we wanted a bit more of a rurally life” (Lesley)
- “Most people who live in this estate are people who have come into the area like us and couldn’t afford to go Upminster or somewhere and thought this was quite nice” (Caroline)
- “Woodlands is a nice estate – it’s not tarred with same brush as Eastside” (estate agent 5)
‘This is the posh part of Eastside’ – the Woodlands oasis

- Woodlands - an ‘oasis’ of cleanliness and order:
  - “It’s the [Eastside] area I don’t like, Woodlands estate is quiet and peaceful”. (S104)
  - “Eastside is an undesirable place with council housing, gypsies in the era, a lot of mess. The crime rate is high outside Woodlands estate – it’s a bit rough and I don’t mix with those in the era”. (S58)

- Split place image - Eastside dominated by class & racialised ‘others’ – ‘not quite white’ groups

- NIMBY mobilisation to further development on estate:
  - “I think people objected because they’d paid a lot of money for their property and all of a sudden they’re trying to cram something like 70 or 80 homes onto this small piece”. (Alan)
‘Not a place I’d frequent’ – avoiding the ‘local’ in the consumption & education fields

- Local blots on the suburban landscape as places to avoid:
  - Council estate
  - Shops & pubs
  - Schools
  - Travellers’ camp sites

- “People living in Woodlands don’t go to the shops in the Eastside shopping parade”. (Wendy, Newtown)
Avoiding the local Eastside shops – the ‘underworld’

- Alan (local government manager) - The underworld’ we call it, yeah. They [council] have improved it. There was one night we did go down there and you did feel threatened because there were lots of gangs.

- June (local government officer) - Well, I mean we just looked out of place, because we both had briefcases, we both had suits and all the clothes on, we look like, you know, downtown New York. And you know, you pulled up in the car, I mean mainly we wanted a film out of Blockbusters didn’t we, and everything had packed up and shut down and then we wanted cash out of the machine. I mean it was just like hell on earth [laughs].

- Alan – Loads, there were loads of kids and gangs. Nothing happened, but as you said it’s perception isn’t it?
This is a poor working-class area. [...] Just things like shops. The shops they cater for the community, they cater for their customers. And there’s lots of, you know, sort of like pound shops, well, you know the type of thing I mean. The cheaper end of the market, there’s no decent restaurants. Well, there is ... I don’t think there is a sit-down restaurant in Eastside. There might be one in the pub; I think you can eat in the pub but I don’t think there’s an actual sit-down restaurant. So if we wanted to go out we wouldn’t, we wouldn’t ... we always go to sort of Brentwood, Upminster, Hornchurch because it’s a different, you know, they’ve ... they’re on a lot less money, they’ve got different – they just live their lives differently.

Louise (school administrator)
## Assessment of local state schools by estate (%)

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<th>Woodlands</th>
<th>Newtown</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Good</strong></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poor</strong></td>
<td>45</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total (N=100%)</strong></td>
<td>53</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>96</td>
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*P < 0.01       Cramer’s V = 0.42*
The local schools [...] are bottom of the league tables and the children that go there aren’t very pleasant. That sounds really snobbish and rude, but if you instill some morals and respect in your children, you’d like them to uphold it in school. We don’t think they would. Well we know they wouldn’t. So we applied for Upminster and luckily because the houses are so expensive, young couples with children [...] can’t afford to live there so they need the children at these schools so they take all the children from Woodlands so it’s really nice, all the children go to the same schools … It’s just bizarre, we might as well have a mini-bus coming from here to Upminster. [...] I spoke to people who had gone round to see the schools that lived on this estate or people that I knew took Their children out of the area [...] they were quite disgusted by them and I thought I don’t really need to go and see them either. [...] Just the way the children were unruly, toilets were filthy, the classrooms were filthy, they just didn’t look like they were, you know, what you would expect in a school or what I would expect in a school anyway. I know this sounds horrible as well, but you get lots of show children. We’ve got a lot of camp sites round here, so you get a lot of Travellers' children going to these schools so you know then English isn’t always their first language so the teachers spend a lot of time trying to help these children so your children aren’t progressing.

Lesley (computer technician)
Well I must admit we are perfectly happy here. My other half really likes it here. His sister has just moved here. They lived in Chingford and they have been burgled and everything. He says ‘after you lot saying we lived in a dodgy area we have never had anything happen to us’. The neighbours are all really friendly, and I have never talked to any of my neighbours in my life, even when we were kids, we never talked to them. They are all fine, I feel like I belong I suppose, it is hard to say, I belong in this area, I am very settled, got a lot of friends and have got quite a bit of family nearish. You know where everything is, you know where you are going, you know what you are doing. All of that, but I don’t feel that I really belong in Eastside itself I suppose, because I go to the library, I go to the doctors, everything, in Upminster.

Caroline (beauty consultant)
... we do hear from neighbours etcetera that the local schools ... and from the local papers ... that the local schools aren’t really doing that well and are not highly rated. So priorities have changed a lot from us having a nice house with a nice garden, good transport links, to what the local area has to offer and I think the initial impressions are that it doesn’t have a lot to offer. Certainly outside of this estate, Eastside area and the [Z] area are, from what I’ve heard, quite high crime spots, a lot of antisocial behaviour that’s going on, you read about it in the local papers all the time. [...] So I think the priority now would be to actually move from this area and look for a good catchment area for good schools.

Dan (senior administrator)
Eastside as a ‘spoiled suburb’

- Woodlands claim to be an “exclusive-but-inconspicuous suburban landscape of privilege” (Allen et al., 2007: 243) compromised by its Eastside location.
- *Spoiled suburb* rather than a pure suburb – too many visible signs of classed and racialised ‘others’ (Watt, 2007).
- Incomers cannot ‘adopt’ the local.
- ‘A gated community without gates’ (Dowling, 1998).
Selective belonging

- Woodlands offers MC distinction in *housing field* but NOT *consumption or educational fields* - because of Eastside

- Resolution of field/habitus disjunction:
  - short/medium term – day-to-day ‘spatial practices’ stretch out beyond Eastside
  - long-term – potential move to another suburb closer to the ‘pure’ suburban ideal

- **Selective belonging**: “a spatially selective narrative of belonging that is limited to a given space within a wider area. That space is invested with a positive place image that the wider locality is considered not to share” (Watt, 2010: 154)

- Policy – Eastside a more ‘socially mixed’ area because of Woodlands – but latter’s residents do not consider W to be part of Eastside
London, the ROSE and the UK

- In most of the UK, the middle classes’ “ideal homes are located close to their current residence” (Savage, 2010: 133)
  - hence elective belonging

- BUT in London & the ROSE, the ideal/current home homology less likely to apply
  - hence *selective* as well as elective belonging
Narratives of belonging to place:
- Dwelling
- Nostalgia
- Elective

Inherited & nostalgic belonging

- **Inherited belonging** – based upon neighbourhood longevity:
  - ‘I belong in this place because I am born and bred here’

- **Nostalgic belonging** – based upon a nostalgic sense of place:
  - ‘I used to belong in this place - but not really now because of the absence of X and the presence of Y’
“... as selective recollection of the past, either alone or with others, in a manner that:

- a) confirms a negative view of the present, and
- b) presents a favourable depiction of the past as an understandable time period”. (Blokland, 2003: 191)
Elective belonging – based upon movement into a neighbourhood and coming to adopt it:
- ‘I belong in this place because I have chosen to live and stay here’

Selective belonging – based upon movement into a neighbourhood and coming to adopt a spatially demarcated area within it:
- ‘I belong in part of this place because I have chosen to live and stay here - but not other parts because of the presence of Y’
Eastside research and related publications