

***RESEARCH REPORT: Conceptualisations and meanings of “community”:
the theory and operationalisation of a contested concept***

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1. Introduction

This AHRC-funded Connected Communities research report explores conceptualisations and meanings of ‘community’ as a contested concept, focusing in particular on how researchers have operationalised the concept of community in the 21st century. The aim of this report is to take stock of recent theoretical and empirical developments in researching communities, identifying continuities, and differences between past and present research. First, we provide a brief survey of previous theoretical and empirical traditions of researching community as a point of reference for analysing recent developments. Then, the main body of the report presents a comprehensive survey of recent developments in the ‘operationalisation’ of community, drawing primarily on the 100 works in the annotated bibliography *Researching Community in the 21st Century* which accompanies this report. Rather than following more traditional approaches which distinguish between communities of place, interest and identity (Willmott 1986), we explore theoretical, empirical and methodological developments in researching communities across four interrelated and overlapping themes: *connection, difference, boundaries and development*. In addition to this focus on how researchers have gone about capturing the meaning of ‘community’ in the research published in these 100 items, the report also draws on interviews conducted with a broad range of researchers with recent experience of undertaking research in the field of ‘community’, and on input to the project from members of the project advisory board. These interviews and other comments provided to us are used to draw some general conclusions about the current state of community research in terms of theory and method, and a brief assessment of prospects for the coming period. This is done in the form of identifying ten key propositions.

Much has happened in recent years to warrant a re-examination of approaches to researching communities, including critical appraisals of the community studies tradition of research

(Brunt 2001; Crow 2002; Day 2006). Raymond Williams (1976: 76) famously argued that community, unlike all other terms of social organisation such as nation, state or society, seems to be defined almost universally as positive. However, many scholars have moved beyond this common sense understanding of community, pointing out the ‘darker’ side to communities as places of exclusion, inequality, oppression and social divisions (Crow 2002; Crow and Maclean 2006; Hoggett 1997; Stacey 1969). While ‘community’ carries many positive connotations, recent conceptualisations of community are more paradoxical than Williams suggested: the term is used both in a positive sense to represent social belonging, collective well-being, solidarity and support networks, and in a negative sense to describe or categorise social problems and ‘problem populations’ (Mooney and Neal 2008). Cohen’s (1985) identification of the problem of community ‘boundaries’ remains highly relevant for the study of community, but ‘boundaries’ have new dimensions in an age of globalisation, Internet communication and increased mobility. Similarly, Willmott’s (1986) classic distinction between communities of place, interest and identity remains relevant to analyses of community, but scholarship has already moved beyond these distinctions to tackle new concepts and issues, such as those surrounding the emergence of virtual communities. Blackshaw (2010: 104) includes virtual communities in his overview, which distinguishes between community as theory, method, place, identity/belonging, ideology, and policy and practice.

Debates about community cohesion (Cooper 2008; Finney and Simpson 2009; Flint and Robinson 2008; Thomas 2011; Wetherell, Laflèche, and Berkeley 2007), ‘communities of practice’ (Amin and Roberts 2008; Kajee 2008; Le May 2009; Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder 2002), internet communities (Boellstorff 2008; Kendall 2002; Papacharissi 2010; Rheingold 2000), sustainable communities (McCright and Clark 2006; O’Riordan and Stoll-Kleemann 2002; Raco 2007), and participatory community research (Aldred 2011; Ghose 2007; Salway, Harriss, and Chowbey 2011; Williamson and DeSouza 2010) provide five examples of how communities continue to evolve in theory and in practice and of why the discussion of the meaning of community and the connections within and between communities necessarily spill over into debates about the research methods needed to capture community phenomena. In addition, recent years have witnessed further developments in the use of the concept of community in policy-related discourse, for example in the areas of care, welfare, crime, health, community resilience, and social exclusion (cf. Brill, et al 2011; Butcher, et al 2007; Chandra, Acosta, Stern, Uscher-Pines, Williams, Yeung, Garnett, and

Meredith 2011; Cooper 2008; Hamdi 2010; Hughes 2007; Kuecker, Mulligan, and Nadarajah 2011; Ledwith 2011; Mooney and Neal 2008; Obrist 2006; Somerville 2011; Taylor 2011).

We broadened the scope of our research review to include research that relates to key themes of community yet uses closely related terms instead of community as core concepts. For example, some scholars prefer to use concepts such as locality, neighbourhood, networks, social capital, belonging, friendship or the city. Some scholars directly challenge the idea of using ‘community’, such as Miller (2008) in his study of contemporary London households on a single street, whereas other authors such as Corcoran et al. (2010) frame their study mainly in terms of ‘social capital’, ‘locality’ and ‘affiliations’, which all relate implicitly to community, but also identify with a loose definition of ‘community’ in their research. Some researchers who focus on particular geographical areas prefer the term ‘neighbourhood’ instead of ‘community’ (Dorling and Thomas 2011; Forrest and Kearns 2001), avoiding the definitional problems associated with community as a contested concept (although ‘neighbourhood’ also comes with definitional challenges). These additional works are important to consider because they demonstrate some of the analytical limitations of ‘community’ and also highlight related concepts and debates.

Alongside these conceptual developments there have been equally far-reaching developments in the methods employed in community-based research (Root 2007). One example of why there is a need for reconsideration of how community is researched is the finding of surveys that reported giving in communities exceeds reports of receiving assistance from other community members, which is at odds with the need for the two totals to be equivalent; the explanation lies in the greater preparedness of people to report giving, and their corresponding reluctance to appear dependent upon others (Crow 2002). More positively, network analysis is a good example of an approach to community research where consideration of the operationalisation of the concept of community assists in the assessment of what is currently known and how further research can make the most of recent methodological innovations (Bærenholdt 2007; Blokland and Savage 2008; Gilchrist 2009). In addition, collaboration between researchers and people being researched, using methods such as collaborative ethnography (Lassiter, et al 2004; Lassiter 2005), has produced more reliable as well as more ethical results. This reflects the broader trend towards the democratisation of the research process. However, the rise in participatory methods in community-based research (Aldred 2011; Ghose 2007; Salway, Harriss, and Chowbey 2011;

Williamson and DeSouza 2010) – in which community members are co-producers, co-researchers and co-authors of research findings— also presents new methodological challenges related to the critical role of the researcher, the valorisation of community ‘voices’ in claims about authenticity and truth, and the ‘ownership’ of the products of research.

There is much that quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods approaches have to offer for researching communities, and their contributions to the understanding of community are not mutually exclusive. Community-based research has traditionally used multiple methods to facilitate triangulation of multiple perspectives. For example, ethnographically based research using a variety of methods was the approach that was commonly associated with community studies in the 1950s and 1960s. Most of the studies in our contemporary research review use a combination of two or more methods, with the following approximate breakdown of methods covered: 40 interviews, 24 ethnographies (or participant observation), 22 case studies, 23 policy analyses, 15 statistics or surveys (with 6 purely quantitative), 14 discourse, media or textual analyses, 14 visual methods, 14 historical and archival methods, 12 participatory methods, 7 focus groups, 6 online/virtual, 6 network analyses, 3 mobile methods, 2 GIS, 1 complexity, 1 ethnology, and 1 ethnomethodology. This range of research methods should not be considered a representative sample, but it seems to reveal that triangulation remains a popular among researchers attempting to capture ‘community’. However, despite the rise in visual, online, mobile, network and participatory methods, these relatively new methods have not displaced more established methods for researching community such as ethnographic observations and interviews. Visual and participatory methods are the most popular of these newer methods in the research reported on in our sample of 100 pieces of community research. We were interested in following up mobile methods in relation to community research and debates about mobility and place, but we found that much of this research uses ‘mobility’ as a central concept rather than ‘community’ per se (Büscher, Urry, and Witchger 2011).

This research report is guided by questions about what is new in the theory and practice of community research and how these developments stand in historical and comparative perspective. There are various obvious points of comparison with the present, such as the New Towns programme (Aldridge 1979) and the Community Development Projects of the 1960’s and 1970’s (Loney 1983) and more recently New Labour approaches to community cohesion (Cooper 2008). We also draw on recent historical studies of community to enable

comparisons between the present and past (Bastian and Alexander 2009; Capp 2003; Raco 2007; Sennett 2012; Tarbin and Broomhall 2008). For example, Capp's (2003) work on the role of gossip in early modern England in reinforcing particular codes of appropriate behaviour and in fostering information support and exchange has parallels with more recent debates on social capital (Blokland and Savage 2008; Corcoran, Gray, and Peillon 2010; Forrest and Kearns 2001) and community morality (Laurier, Whyte, and Buckner 2002). Similarly, the understanding of what is distinctive about the present situation in the UK is usefully informed by comparisons with the situation elsewhere, such as with urban regeneration in the USA and France (Pierson and Smith 2001) and urban social networks in the Netherlands, Italy and Australia as well as these countries (Blokland and Savage 2008). A theme which has only recently emerged in the UK, 'community resilience' (Brill, et al 2011; Gilchrist 2009), has been more widely researched in the United States and Africa (Brown and Schafft 2011; Chamlee-Wright and Storr 2010; Chandra et al. 2011; Holton 2011; Obrist 2006).

Numerous disciplines also have useful contributions to make to researching community both separately and together. The disciplines that are considered include (in alphabetical order) architecture and planning, communications and information science, criminology, development studies, disability studies, ecology, education, ethnic and racial studies, geography, history, housing studies, law, literature, media studies, philosophy, political science, psychology, social anthropology, social policy, social work and community development, sociology, theology, and youth studies, amongst others. Some examples of fruitful interdisciplinary work involving different types of disciplines are the collection of essays on community and ecology (McCright and Clark 2006), the edited volume on community archives by librarians, archivists and lawyers (Bastian and Alexander 2009), and the collection about children in the city (Christensen and O'Brien 2003) which draws on architecture, planning, anthropology, sociology, social policy and education.

The research report does not aim to arrive at a definition of community on which everyone can agree. Rather it will aim to demonstrate that there are good reasons why community is a contested concept, but go on to show that the existence of different approaches actually makes for vibrant and productive debate about what community relationships are, what their challenges are, and what they have the potential to achieve. The discussion of the different meanings of community will be linked to the multiple ways of operationalising community

using a range of research methods, and to the array of approaches arising out of various disciplines. The underlying philosophy will be one of methodological pluralism and interdisciplinarity. The basic premise is that when they are brought together the varying approaches to the study of community have the potential to be greater than the sum of the individual parts.

2 Previous Research on Community: A Brief Overview

Previous literature on the subject of community is extensive, as is to be expected of what is the first and arguably the most important of Robert Nisbet's (1970) 'unit ideas of sociology' which is also a key concept in many other disciplines in the arts and humanities as well as the social sciences. The evolution of this literature and the changing emphases within it as well as the continuities deserves a fuller treatment than it can be given here. Over the years there have been numerous reviews of the field, some seeking to survey and summarise the wealth of empirical investigations that have been undertaken (Bell and Newby 1971; Bell and Newby 1974; Crow and Allan 1994; Crow and Maclean 2006; Day 2006; Frankenberg 1969; Stein 1964; Vidich, Bensman and Stein 1971; Wild 1981). Others have adopted a focus more on theoretical themes (Bauman 2001; Bernard 1973; Blackshaw 2010; Cohen 1985; Crow 2002; Delanty 2003; Hoggett 1997; MacIver 1970; Mason 2000; Stacey 1969) or on methodological themes (Brunt 2001; Crow 2000; Kent 1981; O'Reilly 2012; Payne 1996; Root 2007), although inevitably these themes overlap.

Raymond Williams (1976) identified 'community' as a key concept in the analysis of culture and society, and one that has had a long and influential history. His (1975) review of literary treatments of community relating to the powerful theme of contrasts between the country and the city makes the important point that there is a powerful tendency to associate community with past ways of life, or ways of life that are perceived to be passing, and that this theme is used to support a conception of social change as involving loss. This use of the imagery of lost community as 'a stick to beat the present' (1975: 21), as a counter to narratives of social progress, has parallels in social science. Ferdinand Tönnies's (1955) contrast between 'community' and 'association', first published in 1887, is often treated as an early expression of this point of view, despite the subtleties of that text going beyond such 'one-dimensional understanding' (Harris 2001: xxx). Certainly the oversimplification of these ideas into the notion that communities could be placed at points along a rural-urban continuum stands as a salutary lesson of what can happen when researchers look for simple operationalisations of

the concept of community. It is also worth noting in this context that Ray Pahl's observation that 'Any attempt to tie particular social relationships to specific geographical milieux is a singularly fruitless exercise' (1968: 293) came only after decades of researchers trying to do precisely this.

Part of this story involves the work of the Chicago School conducted in the first few decades of the twentieth century, and widely used as a reference point because of the richness of the various research reports that were produced by members of this group and also because of the suggestiveness of the idea of urban ecology that underpinned them (Abbott 1999; Bell and Newby 1971; Bulmer 1984; Cohen 1985; Smith 1988). However, although the Chicago School's ideas did involve communities having a spatial referent through the identification of different zones in cities, these were zones that had to be understood as part of the overall system, and this helped to convey the dynamic nature of community phenomena. This was particularly evident in the identification of a 'zone of transition' in cities, where movements of people contributed to constantly changing social profiles of core areas. This theme was later picked up in various studies of inner-city areas that became classic points of reference in the literature, such as Herbert Gans's (1962) *The Urban Villagers* and John Rex and Robert Moore's (1967) *Race, Community and Conflict*. In turn, the idea of inner cities as spaces within urban systems that could be further transformed by gentrification developed this perspective in radically new directions using correspondingly different concepts and research methods (Smith and Williams 1986), and this in turn opened up opportunities to re-think the nature not only of inner-urban spaces (Butler with Robson 2003) but also of outer urban areas (Byrne 1989). Although the ideas currently discussed have evolved considerably since the heyday of the Chicago School, it is instructive that contemporary authors such as Tim Butler and Chris Hamnett (2011: 3) can still acknowledge their debt to these intellectual ancestors.

Many similar lineages could be traced to illustrate the continuing influence of older traditions of thought and research practice. It is important to be aware of these for several reasons, not least of which is the capacity of researchers to fall victim to what Herbert Gans (1999) has called 'sociological amnesia', a phenomenon that has parallels in all disciplines. It is easy to forget, for example, that theoretical traditions such as social network analysis and research methods such as the use of photography, both of which have been reinvigorated in recent years as a result of advances in technology allowing more powerful analyses to be developed, do in fact go back many decades. Alwyn Rees's (1950) community study may not have the

sophistication of modern applications of theory and method, but it does serve to remind us that researchers have the capabilities that they do because of the work of forerunners. This is not to say that there is nothing new in how community is understood and researched to-day; that would be immediately contradicted by any one of the recent research outputs on which this report concentrates. But it is to say that many of these achievements are testimony to the adage that we can see further because we stand on the shoulders of giants.

3 Recent developments in the ‘operationalisation’ of community

In this section, we explore theoretical, empirical and methodological developments in researching communities in the 21st century across four interrelated and overlapping themes: *connection, difference, boundaries* and *development*. These themes do not relate specifically to communities of place, interest, identity, attachment, or other ‘types’ of communities, but rather to broader concepts which link various dimensions of community research. The first theme follows directly from the AHRC theme of Connected Communities, showing various ways in which ‘connection’ can be conceptualised and empirically researched in relation to community. By thinking critically about ‘connection’ and ‘connectedness’, the idea of disconnection is also implied, along with ideas of conflict and difference which separate communities and maintain boundaries between outsiders and insiders. The second theme addresses ‘difference’ in relation to communities, both in a positive sense, in terms of celebrating social and cultural diversity and different identities and interests, and also in a negative sense, in terms of social exclusion, conflict and inequality. The third theme relates to the first two themes through identifying a key problem related to researching communities: the idea of boundaries which has been explored systematically in relation to community by Suttles (1972) and Cohen (1985). With this theme, we investigate a number of different types of boundaries which are relevant in contemporary contexts, particularly boundaries related to place, mobility and disciplines. Finally, the fourth theme is of ‘development’, mainly in the context of the social policy sub-discipline of ‘community development’ and its widening scope to include areas such as health, welfare, sustainability, resilience, crime, participatory methods, regeneration and recession, and recognising that ‘development’ is also a contested term. These four themes are closely interconnected, and together they provide a useful framework for addressing cross-cutting themes of researching communities in the 21st century.

2.1 Connection

This section explores the notion of ‘connection’ (connectedness, connectivity) in relation to community, as a starting point for engaging with the AHRC Connected Communities interdisciplinary and collaborative research agenda. The idea of ‘connection’ has been less subject to theoretical scrutiny than the contested idea of ‘community’, and is seemingly more straightforward. Like ‘community’, it also carries generally positive associations. ‘Connected communities’ reads even more positively than either term separately, as the ‘connectedness’ discursively serves to overcome the differences and exclusions which are at least subtly implicit within ‘community’ as a concept on its own. The concept of ‘connected communities’ sounds as though it has transformative potential in shaping healthy, happy and active communities in the present and the future. This research report takes a more critical approach, arguing that for ‘connected communities’ to have theoretical, empirical and methodological weight and indeed, meaningful transformative potential, then it is important to engage explicitly with the contested, contradictory and conflictual dimensions of ‘connected communities’.

‘Connected communities’ is a potentially powerful conceptual and empirical theme because it can be interpreted so widely, suggesting spatial, temporal, social, virtual, economic, political and historical connections between, within and across different communities. Mapping onto the vast literature on ‘community’, the connections could be between communities of place, interest, practice, virtual space-time, identity, another form of ‘community’, or some combination of these. To complicate the concept further, the notion of ‘community’ itself implies connection: the connection or relations between individuals within a community (however defined), captured in notions such as ‘common bonds’, ‘common ties’, or the idea that ‘we belong to one another’ (Hoggart 1994: 184). The nature of the connection is also open to a number of possibilities: connections could be inwards (centrifugal), outwards (centripetal), multidirectional, dispersed, ordered, democratic or hierarchical, and characterised by bridging or bonding (cf. Putnam 2000, re: theories of social capital), depth or superficiality (cf. Granovetter 1973, re: the strength of weak ties), varying durations or degrees, and involving a variety of possibilities in terms of the number of different connections (one, two, several or more). This research report outlines key themes which emerged through our literature review and interviews in relation to various dimensions of ‘connection’: networks, online communities, friendship, families, neighbours, belonging, communities of practice and transnational communities.

Several scholars use the idea of networks for researching communities, albeit in very different theoretical and methodological ways (Bærenholdt 2007; Blokland and Savage 2008; Ghose 2007; Gilchrist 2009; Griffiths, Sigona, and Zetter 2005; Papacharissi 2010). Drawing on actor network theory, qualitative interviews and historical research, Bærenholdt (2007) argues that people cope with distances and construct their communities in Northern Norway, Iceland, the Faroes, and Greenland through innovations, networking, and the formation of identities. *Networked Urbanism: Social Capital in the City* (Blokland and Savage 2008) brings together ideas of networks and social capital, demonstrating how new kinds of 'networked urbanism' have generated new forms of exclusionary social capital in contrast with community networks that existed in the past. The authors include examples from Europe, the US and Australia, using a range of methods including social network analysis, qualitative interviews, mixed methods and case studies. In a different study of the relationship between networks and social capital, Griffiths (2005) explores the issue of integration of refugees, the concept of social capital, and the role of informal networks and resources for refugee communities in the UK. From a community development perspective, Gilchrist (2009) demonstrates in *The Well-connected Community* how informal and formal networks strengthen communities and improve partnership working. The book explores the relationship between networks and community development, arguing that networking is about community, exchange, risk management and solidarity, and showing how networking benefits communities and those who work with them. The study of networks is also considered in relation to quantitative methods: Ghose (2007) explores the public participation geographic information systems (PPGIS) research agenda, responding to criticisms that PPGIS is a complex process with uneven outcomes by developing a new theoretical framework based on the literature on the politics of scale and networks. Finally, the edited collection *A Networked Self* (Papacharissi 2010) examines the idea of networks in relation to the Internet, focusing on self-presentation and identity, the construction of the self, and social connection within online networks. This provides a useful link to the next topic related to connection: online communities.

In the past fifteen years, an increasing amount of research has focused on online communities. The field was already burgeoning at the turn of the century (Smith and Kollock 1999), and this review will touch on only a few of the more recent works (Boellstorff 2008; Kendall 2002; Rheingold 2000). The methods vary from virtual ethnography to online textual

analysis, and recently Kozinets (2009) has formulated a specific method of doing online ethnography called 'netnography'. Rheingold's *The Virtual Community* (2000, first edition in 1993) was one of the first studies of online communities before the growth of the Internet. This book explores the development of virtual communities from the 1960s to the 1990s using a journalistic style, full of anecdotes and personal observations about the growth of online social groups. The book questions the distinction between 'virtual' communities and 'real-life' communities, arguing that real relationships and real communities develop online, with several examples of friendships, arguments, political organizing, and other relationships in the virtual world. Another example of a relatively early online ethnography is Kendall's (2002) of a male-dominated Internet forum comprising primarily computer/IT workers. Based on virtual fieldwork from the mid-1990s, it examines how men and women negotiate their gender roles in an online forum. The author uses the virtual pub 'the Falcon' as a metaphor to describe the social relations and interactions in the online community, particularly because the majority of the Blue Sky participants were male (related to the demographics of people using this type of online forum in the late 1990s), and the Falcon provides the space for them to enact and negotiate their masculine identities. A more recent online ethnography, *Coming of Age in Second Life* (Boellstorff 2008), shows the increasing complexity of social relations on the Internet, based on an in-depth ethnographic field study of Second Life, a virtual world that is owned and managed by the company Linden Lab. The anthropologist Boellstorff conducted research for more than two years in Second Life using the avatar 'Tom Bukowski', employing traditional methods of anthropology – including participant observation and interviews – to study the virtual world through his virtual home and office 'Ethnographia'.

Another way that 'connection' within and between communities are explored within recent research is in the context of social relations. A number of studies focus on families or households and kinship as a way of exploring wider community relations and dynamics (Capp 2003; Charles, Davies, and Harris 2008; Dench, Gavron, and Young 2006; Mumford and Power 2003; Phillipson, Bernard, Phillips, and Ogg 2001; Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan 2001). Several of these studies use mixed qualitative and quantitative methods (Charles, Davies, and Harris 2008; Dench, Gavron, and Young 2006; Mumford and Power 2003; Phillipson, Bernard, Phillips, and Ogg 2001) to combine neighbourhood and household statistical data with in-depth qualitative insights from family members. Most of the studies define 'family' in terms of household, focusing on the impacts of social and economic change

for families living in particular neighbourhoods or communities. However, Weeks et al (2001) challenge traditional ideas of the family through the idea of 'families of choice' in the context of same-sex intimate relationships. 'Families of choice' link to wider discussions about the role of friendship, which has parallels with Spencer and Pahl's (2006) idea of 'personal communities' in *Rethinking Friendship*, and with Savage et al.'s (2005) notion of 'elective belonging' within middle-class communities in Manchester. The idea of 'belonging' is a central theme of connection, a positive form of community solidarity and collective identity (Block 2008; Blokland 2003; Gilchrist et al 2010; Mulgan 2008; Savage, Bagnall, and Longhurst 2005). Another form of social relation that is closely related to notions of 'belonging' is that of neighbours, and a range of authors have explored this topic, primarily using qualitative methods and drawing on theoretical perspectives of social capital, social integration, belonging, reciprocity, affiliation, trust, community morality and social norms and codes (Blokland 2003; Capp 2003; Cole, Batty, and Green 2011; Corcoran, Gray, and Peillon 2010; Crow, Allan, and Summers 2002; Forrest and Kearns 2001; Laurier, Whyte, and Buckner 2002; Rosenblatt, Cheshire, and Lawrence 2009).

Forms of connection within communities have also been explored through the notion of communities of practice. Wenger et al. (2002, p. 4) define communities of practice as 'groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis'. The idea of communities of practice was first developed through an analysis of situated learning (Lave and Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998) and is now widely used within the context of knowledge management and beyond. For example, the edited volume *Community, Economic Creativity and Organization* (Amin and Roberts 2008) debates the role of communities of practice and situated knowledge in driving innovation, competitive advantage, and regional development, primarily within the context of organizational learning. The concept of communities of practice has also been used more widely in contexts such as development, education and health and social care. Kajee (2008) explores communities of practice in the context of online learning in an undergraduate English language and academic literacy classroom at a university in South Africa, and theorises the need for technology in developing countries as a means of social inclusion in the context of the 'digital divide'. The research methods include participant observation and narrative interviews both face-to-face and online with research participants. The aim of the study was to explore the extent to which communities of practice are enabled in an online environment, among non-native English speakers from

technologically under-resourced backgrounds. The edited volume *Communities of Practice in Health and Social Care* (Le May 2009) examines how communities of practice in health and social care can make service development and quality improvement easier to initiate and more sustainable. The authors draw on case studies from the UK and Canada, using ethnographic methods which set out to describe the day-to-day activities of primary care practice, focusing in particular on how clinicians use knowledge in their interactions with patients, carers and colleagues.

Finally, another topic which relates to ‘connection’ is ‘transnational communities’ (Al-Ali and Koser 2002; Levitt 2001; Shavit 2009), a way of describing the connections between people between countries and places. The edited book on transnational communities by Al-Ali and Koser (2002) examines transnational perspectives on international migration, focusing in particular on the relationship between ‘transnational communities’ and home. The book includes empirical research on the impacts of transnationalism in the everyday life of migrants, with ethnographic and comparative historical case studies (including in-depth interviews, observations, mobile methods, and mixed methods) from across Europe, Africa, the Middle East and Asia. *The New Imagined Community* (Shavit 2009) book also addresses transnational communities, focusing on migrants’ imagined national and global communities. Drawing on biographical interviews with migrants, Shavit explores new ways of imagining national community in the context of international migration and global media. In the first part of the book, the author relates the idea of ‘imagining nation states from afar’ to Benedict Anderson’s idea of the nation as an imagined community, arguing that new types of migrants have emerged, such as the ‘passive trans-national’. In the second part of the book, ‘Imagining the Muslim Nation from Afar’, the author shifts the analysis of migrants’ national imaginaries to focus more specifically on how Muslim-Arab religious scholars imagine the rise of a global Muslim nation and use advanced media technologies to enhance their global vision. The topic of transnational communities relates to questions of connection and belonging but also to ethnic diversity and difference.

Indeed, the concept of ‘connected communities’ raises important questions about the implications of the lack of connection(s) for communities. Would this imply, for example, social exclusion, social inequality, social isolation, distrust, xenophobia, and community breakdown? In other words, is connection enough to transcend the differences, contradictions, and contested meanings and understandings between, within and across

communities? Connection is important, but the concept of connection does not do enough work on its own in overcoming differences, not least because a plurality of ‘positive’ yet conflicting concepts of community can coexist, which causes conflict. Having an internet connection helps some people to connect with others and overcome differences across space and time, to access educational and labour market resources, and to maintain and foster friendships and professional ties. But the internet connection does not itself give people the skills, capabilities, and capital (social, economic, cultural, following Bourdieu) to make meaningful connections which overcome certain social inequalities and exclusions. Similarly, connections of other kinds are not necessarily productive if they are superficial, hierarchical, or exploitative, reproducing social and economic orders. In addition, there is a long-standing debate about whether separate communities that have few points of connection with neighbouring communities may have arrived at that position through a voluntary and intentional policy of ‘encapsulation’ (see, for example the discussion on the idea of minority ethnic community encapsulation in Crow and Allan 1994). While the positive and transformative potential of ‘connected communities’ should be acknowledged, researchers cannot ignore the contested and problematic dimensions of community, connectedness, and ‘connected communities’ as a combined concept. The next section will therefore explore approaches to researching communities which engage explicitly with the idea of difference and how this figures in the operation of communities.

2.2 Difference

The notion of ‘difference’ is very important in thinking about communities. As with the idea of ‘community’ itself, ‘difference’ can be understood in both positive and negative ways, one the on hand as a celebration of social and cultural diversity, and on the other hand, as divisive, related to social exclusion, conflict and inequality. These themes are highly relevant in the current UK context of recession, increased tensions over migration and the future of multiculturalism, and concerns over the riots of summer 2011. Recent studies on community reveal many themes related to ‘difference’ within and between communities. First, we will discuss research examples of different ‘communities of interest’ based on people’s shared identities rather than localities (Willmott 1986), particularly social identities based on gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, disability, and class. Secondly, we will explore issues of difference related to inequality and conflict, including themes of social exclusion, community cohesion, and multiculturalism.

A wide range of communities of interest or identity have been topics of recent scholarship. Gender identity and community have been explored in the following examples: a study of the role of gossip and ordinary women in different communities in early modern England (Capp 2003); a study of masculinities and gender relations in a virtual ‘pub’ online community (Kendall 2002), and a study of collective female identities of women in early modern Europe (Tarbin and Broomhall 2008). Gay and lesbian communities have been explored in a range of contexts in the UK, Sweden, America, and online (Bastian and Alexander 2009; Holgersson, Thorn, Thorn, and Wahlstrom 2010; Kendall 2002; Solnit 2010; Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan 2001). An interesting example of research on sexual identity is the book *Same Sex Intimacies* (Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan 2001) which explores what the authors call ‘families of choice and other life experiments’ within same sex intimate relationships. The qualitative research is based on in-depth interviews with 96 self-identified ‘non-heterosexuals’ in the UK, including homosexuals, lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, queers and a range of other labels that people used to identify their sexual orientations. Youth identities have also received considerable attention, with studies focusing on children in the city (Christensen and O’Brien 2003), youth in disadvantaged communities (Brent 2009; Thomas 2011), and participatory methods (Butcher, et al 2007; Williamson and DeSouza 2010). Other studies have focused on the identities of older people, including: *The Family and Community Life of Older People* (Phillipson, Bernard, Phillips, and Ogg 2001) which focuses on three urban contexts in the UK; as well as studies which focus on intergenerational comparisons in work and family life (Charles, Davies, and Harris 2008; Winson and Leach 2002). Disability identities have also been explored in recent research on communities (cf. Craig, Mayo, and Popple 2011), although the study of disability as a social identity has been relatively marginalised within the literature as compared with other identities. One interesting recent study focused on the ‘deaf community’ in America (Pray and Jordan 2010) in the context of recent developments in assistive hearing technology, a rapid increase in the number of deaf children with cochlear implants, growing acceptance of American Sign Language (ASL), and recognition of Deaf culture. The authors explore ideas about the social construction of deafness, changes in racial and ethnic diversity within the deaf community, and the case of the Gallaudet University in Washington, DC ('the flagship educational institution for deaf people') protest of 2006, where the deaf community and culture were ‘at a crossroads’ regarding changes, conflicts and diverse perspectives within the deaf community.

A number of recent studies have related to ethnic identities, particularly in the context of communities of place, and in relation to other social identities, in terms of 'intersectionality' of identities (Butler and Hamnett 2011; Lassiter, et al 2004; Lippard and Gallagher 2011; Shavit 2009; Tate 2007; Wetherell, Laflèche, and Berkeley 2007). Research studies have spanned the UK, the United States, and Europe, with themes ranging from educational aspirations within communities to racially excluded or marginalised communities, to trans-national communities, to communities of identity that are not attached to physical place. Butler and Hamnett (2011) examine how social and economic changes in the East End of London over the past 30 years have influenced the social, residential and educational aspirations of minority ethnic populations, based on detailed survey and in-depth interview work in five areas of East London. The aim of the study was to locate the case study in a wider context of education, aspiration, and the changing ethnic and class structure in most major British cities. *The Other Side of Middletown* (Lassiter, et al 2004) is a collaborative ethnographic re-study of the famous 1929/1937 American community study by Robert and Helen Lynd of Middletown (a pseudonym for the Midwestern city of Muncie, Indiana), which aim to address the omission of Muncie's black community from the original study. The re-study reveals rich historical and contemporary stories of the African American community in Muncie. The edited volume *Being Brown in Dixie* (Lippard and Gallagher 2011) examines how Latin populations in the US South have challenged and changed traditional conceptions of race, making comparisons with similar struggles faced by African Americans. The authors explore the extent to which the Black-White dichotomy of the US South has been disrupted, challenged and (possibly) changed through Latino life and work experiences of race relations in the South. The authors operationalize the idea of community through the ideas of community backlash and new gateway communities, and research methods in this volume include ethnographies, interviews, survey research, and secondary data analysis. *The New Imagined Community* (Shavit 2009) explores new ways of imagining national community in the context of international migration and global media. Shavit relates the idea of 'imagining nation states from afar' to Benedict Anderson's idea of the nation as an imagined community, arguing that new types of migrants have emerged, such as the 'passive trans-national'. The book focuses more specifically on how Muslim-Arab religious scholars imagine the rise of a global Muslim nation and use advanced media technologies to enhance their global vision, based on biographical interviews with devout Muslims who migrated from Arab countries to Frankfurt am Main, Germany. Finally, ethnic identity has also been explored as a distinct community of identity that is not necessarily related to place, for example in the study of the

'Black interstitial community' (Tate 2007), which addresses the notion of the 'Black community' as an identity that is attached to talk and discourse rather than place, arguing there are boundaries of affect rather than physical boundaries when talking about 'the Black community', and that these boundaries are circumscribed by a politics of race.

Finally, class identity has been explored within much of the literature, although primarily indirectly. In other words, identities based on social class have generally been framed more widely in relation to issues of inequality, social exclusion, and marginalisation rather than directly in relation to class (Butler and Hamnett 2011; Dench, Gavron, and Young 2006; Lupton 2003; Orford, Dorling, Mitchell, Shaw, and Smith 2002; Rogaly and Taylor 2011; Rosenlund 2009; Salcedo and Torres 2004; Savage, Bagnall, and Longhurst 2005; Smith 2005). For example, social exclusion emerged as a key theme of 'difference' in relation to communities, particularly in relation to UK contexts (Lupton 2003; Smith 2005; Wallace 2010). The language of 'social exclusion' is more central than the language of 'class' in these studies, reflecting changing orientations in social policy discourses, particularly in relation to New Labour initiatives from 1997 to 2010. For example, *Remaking Community?: New Labour and the Governance of Poor Neighbourhoods* (Wallace 2010) examines the interconnected uses of 'community' in UK government rhetoric and practice, drawing on qualitative research conducted in a New Deal for Communities (NDC) neighbourhood under New Labour. The research draws on the experiences of residents living in an NDC neighbourhood defined as 'socially excluded', including interviews with a range of residents either individually or together in focus groups. The book explores why the concept of community was so central to New Labour and policy actors, and what it meant for neighbourhoods' residents who were part of the NDC regeneration project. The book explores the political, emotional and cultural impact of the regeneration experience for residents, linking the contested conceptualisation and mobilisation of 'community' to debates on citizenship and social exclusion. Another study that focuses on social exclusion, but more specifically in relation to the 'margins' between inclusion and exclusion, is *On the Margins of Inclusion* (Smith 2005). Smith's book explores the varied ways that individuals and communities adapt to and resist changing labour markets and social policies via the case study of a largely white, working-class housing estate in outer south London. It examines the sources of community-based social exclusion and the wider implications for the life chances and working lives of economically marginal individuals. The research methods are qualitative and biographical, including a combination of in-depth unstructured and semi-structured

interviews, with the latter focusing on work history, experience of and attitudes towards employment training schemes, perceptions of labour market opportunities, and social sources of support and information relating to work. The author reflexively notes that his own experience growing up on a housing estate in south London was an inspiration for his interest in the topic. He carefully considers ethical dilemmas of researching marginalised people, particularly those who are engaged in illegal activities within the local informal economy. A third example of a recent study on social exclusion in the UK context is *Poverty Street* (Lupton 2003), which examines neighbourhood decline and poverty in twelve of the most disadvantaged areas in England and Wales. The research methods combine neighbourhood statistics, photographs and the accounts of local people with analysis of broader social and economic trends. In general, the book uses the concept of neighbourhood rather than community as a central focus of the study, but the closely related idea of community is also used throughout, particularly in relation to community organizations, policy initiatives such as the Community Development Programme and the New Deal for Communities, and in reference to identity groups such as 'white working-class community' and 'Asian community'. Lupton evaluates the impact of government neighbourhood renewal policies since 1997 and considers future policy prospects for reducing inequalities, including potential new solutions for avoiding concentrations of poverty, improving housing, mixing tenure and tackling worklessness and achieving economic inclusion.

Studies of ethnic diversity and social exclusion were deeply interrelated within different studies, showing how particular communities of identity often dovetail with communities of place. In areas marked by social exclusion and disadvantage, the concept of 'community' in these contexts often has a negative connotation, as a byword for 'problem populations' (Mooney and Neal 2008). Tensions between different communities have become particularly apparent in increasing debates about community cohesion and multiculturalism, which a number of recent studies have addressed (Cooper 2008; Dench, Gavron, and Young 2006; Finney and Simpson 2009; Flint and Robinson 2008; Noxolo and Huysmans 2009; Thomas 2011; Wetherell, Laflèche, and Berkeley 2007). Given the wide range of studies that have focused on these interrelated topics, in this report we will focus on some of the more controversial studies on community cohesion and multiculturalism. For example, *The New East End* (Dench, Gavron, and Young 2006) focuses on current conflicts over housing, benefits and services between Bangladeshi families and 'traditional' white working class families in the East End of London. The authors argue that these conflicts have been

exacerbated by the influx of students and members of the middle classes to the area, and challenges liberal assumptions which tend to portray the white working class as racist, rather than understanding the complex social, economic and historical factors shaping white working class perspectives. One of the most controversial claims of this study was that white perceptions of disadvantage in relation to public housing allocation had some basis in fact, which poses an interesting methodological and epistemological issue about the role of perceptions in social research. Another book that tackles controversial themes is *Sleepwalking to Segregation? Challenging Myths about Race and Migration* (Finney and Simpson 2009), which challenges the argument by Trevor Phillips, the head of the Commission for Racial Equality, that Britain is 'sleepwalking to segregation'. The book examines recent debates about community cohesion, and arguing that many contemporary claims about race and migration are myths. Specifically, the book highlights the following as myths of race and migration: that 'Britain takes too many immigrants'; that 'so many minorities cannot be integrated'; that 'minorities do not want to integrate', that 'Britain is becoming a country of ghettos', and the myth of 'minority white cities', showing how the myths were constructed and do not stand up to the examination of statistical evidence derived from sources such as the Census. The book argues that instead of dwelling on myths about race and migration, policy should open up debates to new policy frameworks which address meeting human rights and meeting basic needs, focusing on problems of inequality, living standards, and perceptions of inequality. By contrast, *Youth, Multiculturalism and Community Cohesion* (Thomas 2011) offers a controversial academic evaluation of 'community cohesion' policies in the UK as potentially positive rather than negative. The starting point for the book is the 2001 riots in the towns and cities of Oldham, Burnley and Bradford in the north of England, where there were violent clashes between Asian young men, white young men and the police. Thomas examines the post-2001 shift towards 'community cohesion' as a core UK policy, analyses debates about its contested meanings, understandings and implications, and argues that 'community cohesion' in practice can have positive impacts, rather than representing a turn towards assimilationist policies as many critics suggest. This book highlights interesting tensions between different political visions of community cohesion and multiculturalism and the difficulties of using 'loaded' terminology within social policy.

Ideas of connection and difference, inclusion and exclusion, and tolerance and acceptance, both between and within communities, suggest that communities have limits, edges, or

boundaries. In order for a community to define itself as a community, there has to be some kind of boundary between who comprises the community and who doesn't, between insiders and outsiders. Communities are often concerned with protection of their shared identities, interests, places, and attachments, with ensuring their continued survival in the face of socio-economic and demographic change. The next section will explore precisely this notion of the boundary in relation to community.

2.3 Boundaries

The proposition on which I wish to focus is that boundary is essentially a matter of consciousness and experience, rather than of fact and value. As an item of consciousness, it is inherent in people's identity and is a predicate of their culture.
(Cohen 1985: 22).

According to Anthony Cohen, people symbolically construct their communities, particularly through marking 'boundaries', making community 'a resource and repository of meaning, and a referent of their identity' (Cohen 1985: 118). Cohen was one of the first scholars of community to critically address the problem of the 'boundary' in relation to community. Specifically, Cohen identified the tension between inclusion and exclusion in the construction of communities, which need to construct both commonality amongst insiders, and difference with outsiders. As such, following the themes of connection and difference that have been discussed in this report, Cohen argued that communities imply both similarity and difference. Moreover, Cohen argued that boundaries are used, both physically and 'in the minds of the beholders' (1985: 12), in order to construct communities. The problem of the boundary, and the implication that community philosophically implies exclusion, has been taken further by some scholars. For example, Margaret Stacey argues that 'community' is too loaded and abstract to be useful for sociological analysis and that it is difficult to separate out changes in local communities from those in their wider national contexts (Stacey 1969), while Roberto Esposito argues that community can only be seen as a 'void' or a 'debt' to others (Esposito 2009), and Jean-Luc Nancy warns of the problems of 'community' as an essentialised idea that has dominated western thought, proposing instead an idea of community as political resistance to immanent power (Nancy 1991). In this section on 'boundaries', we will explore the concept of boundaries through looking at different 'types' of boundaries, both physical and 'mental', related to identity and experience, but also to place. First, we will examine

spatially defined boundaries of communities, including the street, the city, the suburb, the rural, the neighbourhood, and the gated community. We will also explore issues that disrupt the notion of spatially defined boundaries, including mobility, migration, and other forms of fluidity between spatial boundaries in the context of globalisation and trans-national migration. Finally, we will investigate boundaries between ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ communities, and between different disciplines in researching communities.

The spatial limits of the ‘community’ varied greatly in our research, from the micro-context of the multi-ethnic single street study—Atlee’s Cowley Road in Oxford, Hall’s Walworth Road in south London, and Miller’s ‘Stuart Street’ (a pseudonym) in south London (Attlee 2007; Hall 2009; Miller 2008), to the wider context of the city—with research examples focusing on Gothenburg (Sweden), Muncie (USA), London, San Francisco, and Stavanger (Norway), amongst others (Holgersson, Thorn, Thorn, and Wahlstrom 2010; Imrie, Lees, and Raco 2009; Lassiter, et al 2004; Rosenlund 2009; Solnit 2010). Perhaps the most common spatially defined area of the community was found in studies of the ‘neighbourhood’, including studies of neighbourly relations, belonging, social capital, social cohesion, and neighbourhood renewal (Blokland 2003; Brill, et al , et al2011; Cole, Batty, and Green 2011; Crow, Allan, and Summers 2002; Dench, Gavron, and Young 2006; Forrest and Kearns 2001; Lupton 2003; Mumford and Power 2003; Orford et al. 2002; Wallace 2010). Some scholars prefer the term ‘neighbourhood’ to ‘community’ (e.g. Forrest and Kearns 2011; Lupton 2003), while others use both terms, and their associated meanings, as complementary (e.g. Crow, Allan, and Summers 2002; Mumford and Power 2003; Wallace 2010).

In addition to research on social relations and identities within and between neighbourhoods, recent studies have contributed to understandings of particular types of neighbourhoods. Specifically, the suburb and the gated community are two types of neighbourhood which have been widely criticised within urban and community studies as elitist, exclusive, and homogeneous. *Suburban Affiliations* (Corcoran, Gray, and Peillon 2010) explores suburban life, change and affiliations through a detailed study of four suburbs of Dublin. Using mixed qualitative and quantitative case study methods (combining in-depth interviews, observations, visual methods and surveys, and including a focus on children’s views of the world as well as adults’), the authors explore the impact of recent suburban developments which grew up around Dublin during the Irish economy’s boom years of the mid-1990s. The authors locate the Irish suburb within the wider context of debates and empirical studies of suburbs in the

United States, Canada, Britain and Europe. The book challenges negative stereotypes about social life in the suburbs, which tend to portray suburbia as homogeneous, superficial and disconnected or, where a more definite culture is identified, oppressive (Baumgartner 1988; Clapson 2003; Richards 1990; Silverstone 1997). Rather, the authors argue that suburbs represent 'arenas of affiliations' where residents are connected with the people and places in their communities in ways which are 'neither entirely superficial nor deeply intimate'. The authors suggest that 'affiliation' is a better model for understanding connectedness and embeddedness within suburbs, rather than the overused concept of social capital. Another study which challenges negative images of neighbourly relations in suburbia is an article on 'neighbouring as an occasioned activity' (Laurier, Whyte, and Buckner 2002). This article challenges the common idea about social and cultural commentators that suburban neighbourhoods lack a sense of community. The article brings together ideas of neighbourhood and community to examine a more nuanced and grounded understanding of suburban living. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in a UK suburb, the authors draw on insights from ethnomethodology and other studies of social practice to offer therapeutic descriptions of neighbouring. Through focusing on the incident of the search for a lost cat, the ethnographic research 'shows how everyday talk formulates places and is formulated by its location in the ongoing occasioned activities of neighbours'. (p. 346) The authors argue, in contrast with other studies which depict suburbia as lacking in neighbourly relations, that there are rules of good neighbouring within a suburban community, including specific and local moral commitments as well as forms of social distancing between neighbours.

Another type of community that has received ever greater criticism by urban scholars as elitist and exclusionary is the gated community, also typically associated with wealthy Americans (Low 2003; McKenzie 1994). Two studies in our review provide complex and nuanced analyses of gated communities, pushing beyond a singular ideal type, and setting the concept within a wider international and comparison context (Bagaeen and Uduku 2010; Salcedo and Torres 2004). The edited book entitled *Gated Communities: Social Sustainability in Contemporary and Historical Gated Developments* (Bagaeen and Uduku 2010) contests the history and meaning of gated communities and argues for deeper thinking about the nature of gated communities. In the foreword, the urban sociologist Saskia Sassen argues that the concept of gated communities has become fixed and narrow, and that it could usefully be extended-- for example, 'the poor also need protected spaces' (p. xii). The book is very diverse both conceptually and empirically, with wide-ranging case studies of gated

communities from the Middle East, China, Nigeria, South Africa, Argentina, Mexico, France, and New Zealand. The case studies demonstrate many diverse forms of ‘gating’, in terms of different communities, local contexts, social struggles, and political and territorial processes of self-segregation, exclusion and territorialisation. Salcedo and Torres (2004) also challenge dominant negative definitions of gated communities through the counter-example of a more benevolent form of gated community in Santiago, Chile, which questions how far gated communities are characterised by impermeable boundaries.

Many of the studies of place-based communities in recent research focus on urban contexts, whether at the smaller scales of streets and neighbourhoods, or at the wider scales of whole cities. Another important type of community which is spatially but also ‘mentally’ defined is the ‘rural community’. Research studies on rural communities in the UK and the USA have grappled with the challenges to ‘rural’ communities and identities in the context of globalisation and urbanisation. For example, the book *Rural People and Communities in the 21st Century* (Brown and Schafft 2011) argues that despite overwhelming urbanization in the twenty-first century, rural communities have proven resilient in the face of significant social and economic changes, and that rural people and places matter in contemporary society. The book focuses primarily on the US context but also includes some international comparisons, and draws on the methods of political economy, demographic statistics, and case studies to explore various social and economic dimensions of rural communities and life. Another perspective of rural communities in the US is presented in *Changing Works: Visions of a Lost Agriculture* (Harper 2001), an in-depth longitudinal qualitative study which traces the impacts of social, economic and cultural changes on agriculture in America, drawing on in-depth interviews with dairy farmers in upstate New York, historical documents, and visual methods (analysis of over 100 photographs from the mid-20th century and more recent revisiting of their themes). The title 'changing works' refers to the common practice within farming communities of exchanging and combining farm labour to do large agricultural jobs like threshing and haying, and it is also suggestive of the changing nature of work in rural communities. Harper describes past practices, work and family roles, gendered divisions of labour, and ways of life in agricultural communities, and the changes that have occurred over the past half century. He concludes that while technology has reduced the amount of agricultural labour required to complete farm work, the transition to larger and fewer farms has meant a loss in social solidarities within agricultural communities and negative implications for the environment. By contrast, *The Sociology of Rural Life* (Hillyard 2007)

critically examines rural sociology through three case studies of contemporary rural issues in the UK context: the 2001 foot-and-mouth disease epidemic in the UK, the hunting debate in the British countryside, and game shooting in the UK. The author situates rural sociology in relation to urban sociology, arguing that it has been relatively neglected over the years.

Hillyard uses interactionist theory and ethnography to approach the study of rural life. The idea of community is explored through tracing the history of rural sociology, with early community studies of rural life. The concept of community is also investigated through rural communities of occupation, such as farmers, veterinarians and hunters. The book shows the complexity of rural societies and rural issues in the UK in the 21st century and argues that sociology and geography should engage more actively with rural studies and the issue of how rural communities are re-created through processes such as children's socialisation into their norms.

As we discussed in relation to the theme of 'connection', a number of recent studies have explored forms of connection across communities, including connection between the real and the virtual (Boellstorff 2008; Kajee 2008; Kendall 2002; Le May 2009; Papacharissi 2010; Rheingold 2000), and through connection through trans-national migration and increasing mobility of populations within and between countries, cities, and communities (Al-Ali and Koser 2002; Charles, Davies, and Harris 2008; Finney and Simpson 2009; Noxolo and Huysmans 2009; Savage, Bagnall, and Longhurst 2005). However, some of the recent research on communities in the 21st century suggests that despite the rise in mobility, international migration, online social networking, and other trends related to globalisation and technological change, place remains very important for communities and identity. For example, the book *Globalisation and Belonging* (Savage, Bagnall, and Longhurst 2005) illustrates the tension between globalisation and mobility on the one hand, and place and belonging on the other hand. The book explores how far-reaching global changes are articulated locally through examining the cultural practices, lifestyles and identities of 182 residents in four middle-class locations around Manchester, UK, in the late 1990s. The study focuses on people's own narratives of connectivity and global ties which arise from their daily routines of work, residence and leisure. Through local case studies informed by qualitative interviews, the authors empirically examine forms of mobility as well as fixity, arguing that Manchester is a telling site in which to study global change and local belonging. Within the broad conceptual framework of globalisation and belonging, the authors discuss the following interrelated themes: the limits of local attachment; parenting, education and

elective belonging; suburbia and the aura of place; the ambivalence of urban identity; work cultures and social ties; mediascapes in the mediation of the local and the global, and cosmopolitanism, diaspora and global reflexivity. A key insight within our review of research on communities in the 21st century is the increasing disruption or transgression of boundaries through global and virtual connections, but also a recognition of the limits of these possibilities based on tensions, conflicts, and attachments. Gabrielle Modan's (2007) study of how these attachments, tensions and conflicts can play out as 'turf wars' is a good example of discourses of community being deployed in practice (in the context of a rapidly-changing neighbourhood in Washington DC), and of what can be learned about these processes through discourse analysis.

One further consideration in relation to the question of 'boundaries' and communities is the value in interdisciplinary thinking about communities, of crossing the 'boundaries' between disciplines in the social sciences and arts and humanities. A number of research studies in this report come from social science disciplines, including sociology, social policy, urban studies, ethnicity and migration studies, organisational studies, geography, political science, international relations, and anthropology, amongst other topics. We also discovered distinctive insights from arts and humanities disciplines, including: histories of communities which highlight changes and continuities in ideas, identities, and practices of community over time (Bastian and Alexander 2009; Capp 2003; Raco 2007; Tarbin and Broomhall 2008); philosophies of community which unpack the concept of 'community' within intellectual history, modern thought, and social and political theory (Day 2006; Esposito 2009; Etzioni, Volmert, and Rothschild 2004); community archaeology, which is a growing field within archaeology with interesting ideas of public engagement and community history (Simpson 2010); and urban architecture and planning which highlights the importance of the built environment in making safe, diverse, and liveable communities (Christensen and O'Brien 2003; Hall 2009).

The notion of the 'boundary' remains integral to how we think about the construction of communities, both physically and 'mentally' or symbolically. While many of Cohen's observations about boundaries remain highly relevant for analysing the symbolic construction of communities, this research review reveals that over the past twenty to thirty years, boundaries have become more complex with the disruption or transgression of boundaries, through increasing mobility, migration, globalisation, and real and virtual social networks.

2.4 Community development

This final section moves from considering notions of connection, difference, and boundaries within and across communities, to the more practical issue of how to address issues of sustainability, public policy, community engagement, health, sustainability, welfare, socio-economic deprivation, and related issues which are often framed within the area of ‘community development’-- as a vocation, as a topic of social policy research, and as a way of working with communities. We will first discuss ‘community development’ as a contested concept, and then explore some recent ‘community development’ themes within research, including: participatory methods, health, resilience, sustainability, recession, and regeneration and post-industrial change. These issues are an important point to conclude with, for these relate directly to important policy issues about the future of our communities.

It is important to note from the outset that – in common with the concept of ‘community’-- ‘community development’ is also a contested concept. A wide number of recent texts on various issues and debates about ‘community development’ as a research area, a way of working with communities, and a vocation (cf. Block 2008; Brent 2009; Butcher, et al 2007; Craig, Mayo, and Popple 2011; Gilchrist 2009; Hamdi 2010; Kuecker, Mulligan, and Nadarajah 2011; Ledwith 2011; Otsuka and Kalirajan 2010; Park, Wang, and Centre for Economic Policy Research (Great Britain) 2010; Somerville 2011; Taylor 2011). *The Community Development Reader* (Craig, Mayo, and Popple 2011) provides an historical overview of community development in the UK dating from the 1950s, with contributors from community development, social work, education and a range of related disciplines. In addition to tracing the history of community development in the UK, a number of substantive themes and issues of community development are explored, including working with community groups, community participation, poverty programmes, local planning, community action, the response of community work to racism, equality, education, feminist principles and organising in community work, active citizenship, multiculturalism and community cohesion, disability narratives, global citizen action, health inequalities, the politics of community development, and radical approaches to community development. This book shows how community development has expanded as an area of research and community action to both more inclusive and participatory.

Other authors have been more critical of ‘community development’ as a concept. For example, in the book *Understanding Community*, Somerville (2011) critically discusses the concept of ‘community development’, particularly the contested character of a ‘developed’ community, drawing connections to neo-colonialism and gentrification. *Community Development: A Critical Approach* (2nd ed.) (Ledwith 2011) goes further, outlining a critical approach to community development, or what Ledwith terms ‘radical community development’. The first chapter focuses on the question ‘why empower?’, tracing a history of radical community development and relating it to debates about the Big Society and critiques of radical community development. The next chapters explore community profiling and the idea of critical praxis, the influence of the ideas of Paul Friere, Antonio Gramsci and feminist theory on critical pedagogy, and emancipatory action research as a principle of organising in the community, concluding with a call for reclaiming the radical agenda within community development. The research is mainly theoretical and practical in orientation, but also includes extensive discussion of research methods for radical community development, including participatory practice and community action research. Another book *Critical Community Practice* (Butcher, et al 2007) advances an alternative theoretical framework to community development, which Butcher calls ‘critical community practice’ (CCP). In the introductory chapter, Butcher lays out the conceptual foundation for CCP, emphasising the importance of power and engagement. Butcher then explores the significant of power through several case studies including: neighbourhood governance in Chicago; youth councils in Espoo and Lambeth; cooperative community enterprise in Leicester and Minster; and local participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre and Salford/Harrow. On the basis of the theoretical framework combined with these case studies, in chapter four Butcher outlines a model for CCP which comprises four interrelated aspects: critical consciousness, critical theorizing, critical action, and critical reflection. In the second half of the book, different authors apply Butcher’s CCP model to a range of community, practice, organizational, and policy contexts.

Another approach to community development is advanced in *The Well-Connected Community* (Gilchrist 2009), which demonstrates how informal and formal networks strengthen communities and improve partnership working. The book explores the relationship between networks and community development, particularly in the UK context but also drawing on some international examples, arguing that networking is about community, exchange, risk management and solidarity, and showing how networking benefits communities and those who work with them. The author also explores the idea of complexity

theory in relation to the well-connected community, arguing that ‘the well-connected community is a way of thinking about community as emergent of complex and dynamic systems’, a ‘way of managing chaos, building resilience and devising innovative collective solutions to intractable problems’ (Gilchrist 2009: x). The book addresses some of the challenges of a networking approach to community development, such as accountability, role boundaries and ‘burnout’, and concludes by examining some of the implications of the model for policy and practice in community development.

For the purposes of this research review, we do not propose to accept, reject, or modify different concepts and practices of community development, but rather to explore different themes that ‘community development’ research and practice have addressed in recent studies. One of the most significant contributions to ways of researching and engaging with communities has been methodological: through the use of participatory methods, also known as ‘action research’ (cf. Aldred 2011; Brill, et al 2011; Butcher, et al 2007; Chandra et al. 2011; Cooper 2008; Craig, Mayo, and Popple 2011; Ghose 2007; Lassiter, et al 2004; Ledwith 2011; Park et al 2010; Salway, Harriss, and Chowbey 2011; Taylor 2011; Williamson and DeSouza 2010). Participatory methods, or action research, involve working closely with research participants as co-producers of knowledge. Different researchers have engaged with participatory methods to different degrees and for different purposes, some with the aim to empower local communities, and others to allow greater voice to research participants within academic research. The edited book *Researching Communities: Grounded Perspectives on Engaging with Communities* (Williamson and DeSouza 2010) includes a range of perspectives from academics, researchers and practitioners on undertaking community-inclusive research, with methodological exemplars for doing community-based research including: Community network analysis: Communications, neighbourhood and action; Children in communities affected by conflict and natural disaster in north and east Sri Lanka; Soulful research: Using an arts-based methodology to authentically engage with local communities; Involving refugees in focus group research; The stranger within: Rethinking distance and proximity of the researcher as community member; The sharing of power: Reflections on community initiated research; and Direct qualitative analysis of data from digital audio sources, amongst others. One of the core themes of the collection is the value of participatory methods in community research: doing research with communities instead of on communities, involving community members as producers or co-producers of research, and challenging the ‘conventional’ role of the researcher within the research process. However,

participatory methods have also presented community researchers with challenges in terms of balancing roles in collaboration, academic analysis, and dissemination of research. For example, in a recent article entitled 'From community participation to organisational therapy? World Café and Appreciative Inquiry as research methods', Rachel Aldred (2011) critically examines two popular participatory research and policy-making methods within community development, World Cafe (WC) and Appreciative Inquiry (AI). The author argues that both WC and AI offer innovative approaches to research but that they are potentially problematic, with the risk of imposing an interpretation of structural problems as 'misperceptions', a potentially stigmatizing interpretation of 'empowerment' and making questionable assumptions about social change. This article is valuable to read along-side the growing literature which promotes the use of participatory methods of community research.

A number of recent studies have addressed issues of resilience in communities and cities (cf. Brown and Schafft 2011; Chamlee-Wright and Storr 2010; Chandra et al. 2011; Holton 2011; Obrist 2006; Poll, Kennedy, and Sanderson 2009). A research report by Chandra et al (2011) focuses on the importance of building community resilience for national health security in the US context. While recognising the need for local planning teams to define community 'boundaries' and the wide range of meanings of 'community', the term 'community' is used primarily to describe a geographical catchment area of the local health department. The research findings are based on a substantive literature review, six stakeholder focus groups across the United States, and three meetings with relevant subject matter experts (SMEs). The definition and application of community resilience is outlined as comprising: wellness and population health, public education (about disaster preparedness, risks and resources), engagement (participatory decision-making in planning, response and recovery activities), self-sufficiency, partnership (between government and other organisations), quality (to monitor and evaluate progress in building community resilience), and efficiency (of use of existing community resources). Another study that relates to community resilience is the edited volume *The Political Economy of Hurricane Katrina and Community Rebound* (Chamlee-Wright and Storr 2010) which focuses on the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. This book critically examines public policies which led to both successes and failures in post-Katrina disaster response and long-term community recovery. Drawing on both quantitative and qualitative analysis, and theoretically informed by the Virginia School of Political Economy, the contributors to this book seek to understand the community recovery process through analysing on-the-ground perspectives of first-responders, residents, business

owners, musicians, teachers, school administrators, and other ordinary citizens. The authors explore the problems of social coordination presented by disasters, and both the positive potential and the limitations of public policy in overcoming the difficult challenges of disaster response and recovery.

Two other studies demonstrate how importance insights about community resilience can be gained through studying 'poor' communities in Africa. The first book, *Building the Resilient Community: The Lost Boys of Sudan* (Holton 2011) is based on ethnographic research in Kakuma Refugee Camp and remote villages of southern Sudan, a communal case study of 'the Lost Boys of Sudan', a group of devoutly Christian refugees. Holton explores the strong cultural and religious beliefs about a sense of responsibility, care and obligation towards others of the refugees, arguing that their ability to survive destruction and displacement through the power of communal obligations and care, and the strength of faith narratives, represents a unique and inspiring model of a resilient community. The second book, *Struggling for Health in the City* (Obrist 2009) contributes to debates about community health, vulnerability and resilience. This ethnographic study examines what health means for people living in poverty, focusing on women in Dar es Salaam's inner-city neighbourhood of Ilala Ilala in Tanzania. The anthropological research includes interviews and participant observation and was conducted between 1995 and 1996, with some additional research in 2002. The findings suggest that people view health as 'vulnerability to health risks' rather than as the opposite of illness and disease, based on their daily experiences of exposure to a variety of risks including going without water, food, sanitation or adequate shelter. This actor-centred approach shifts the focus from illness and disease towards local meanings of health and vulnerability. The book argues that women bear a growing burden in daily health practice because of minimal state services and the failure of many men in their role as breadwinners. However, the author is reflexive about her position as a feminist scholar and resists criticizing men who fail to support their families or imposing her view on women who did not reveal unhappiness with their positions.

Struggling for Health in the City (Obrist 2009) demonstrates the strong connections between community resilience and community health. Other scholars have written on the topic of community health in different contexts, for example in relation to communities of practice (Le May 2009) and participatory methods (Salway, Harriss, and Chowbey 2011). Le May (2009) examines how communities of practice (CoPs) in health and social care can make

service development and quality improvement easier to initiate and more sustainable. The authors draw on case studies from the UK and Canada, showing how the theory of CoPs is implemented in the delivery of health and social care and highlighting the associated potential, complexities, advantages and disadvantages of CoPs. Salway, Harriss, and Chowbey (2011) discuss the use of participatory, observational and 'rapid appraisal' methods with community researchers for researching health and illness. The methodological approach had three features: firstly, the researchers took a locality-focused approach, identifying four geographically delineable 'communities' or 'localities' in London; secondly, the researchers worked in collaboration with a team of community researchers, and thirdly the researchers employed a range of data generation methods combining participatory techniques, observation and naturalistic interaction with individuals and groups. The authors argue that having a particular ethnic identity and residing within a particular geographic area can have significant implications for the health options available to individuals.

Another key concept which relates to community resilience, health, and well-being is the notion of 'sustainability'. This edited book *Community and Ecology: Dynamics of Place, Sustainability and Politics* (McCright and Clark 2006) brings together perspectives from community sociologists and environmental sociologists about human interactions in ecological communities. The authors argue that humans live in social communities that are embedded ecologically within overlapping biophysical environments. The book is divided into three main sections which address the ecological and social significance of place, the challenges of local sustainability, and local environmental politics. A range of methods are used throughout the volume, including ethnographic interviews, participant observation, visual methods, event/action modelling, narrative analysis of archival data, statistical analysis of archival data, and comparative case studies, with international examples of communities in the UK, US, Canada, Finland, China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Another edited volume, *Biodiversity, Sustainability, and Human Communities: Protecting Beyond the Protected* (O'Riordan and Stoll-Kleemann 2002) examines biodiversity, sustainability and human communities, with contributions from political scientists, economists and ecologists. The book advocates both the preservation of the best remaining habitats and the enhancement of new biodiverse habitats to ensure that they cope with human impact, climate change and alien species invasion. According to the authors, these aims can be achieved by a mixture of strict protection, inclusive involvement of people inside and in close proximity to reserves, and by

combining concern for livelihoods and social well-being in all future biodiversity management. Drawing on mixed case study methods, the contributors examine and discuss case studies from regions around the world, including Europe, the United States, Latin America and Africa. A third study *Building Sustainable Communities: Spatial Policy and Labour Mobility in Post-war Britain* (Raco 2007) looks more specifically at ‘sustainability’ in the UK context. The book develops a historically grounded analysis and assessment of the relationships between spatial policy, community development and labour market policies in post-war Britain. The book explores the ways in which policy-makers in the UK, in different eras, have sought to use state powers and regulations to create more sustainable communities. The research draws on a range of methods, including semi-structured interviews, archival research, and analysis of policy documents. The author traces historical changes in the UK since 1945 in community-building policy frameworks, place imaginations, and core spatial policy initiatives in the UK, examines tensions within spatial policy visions, and shows that there are significant policy lessons that can be learnt from the experiences of the past.

The idea of learning policy lessons from the past provides a good segue to the final themes that we will discuss in relation to community development; the impact of recession (cf. Brill, et al 2011; Dorling and Thomas 2011), and the prospects for regeneration (cf. Byrne 2001; Dicks 2000; Imrie, Lees, and Raco 2009; Lupton 2003; Maginn 2004; Wallace 2010; Winson and Leach 2002). A compelling account of the impacts of recession in the UK is the book *Bankrupt Britain* (Dorling and Thomas 2011), an ‘atlas’ of the social, economic and environmental impacts of the recession on Britain, with 50 detailed colour maps (cartograms rather than standard maps) showing how different areas have been affected by the 2007 banking crisis, the 2008 economic crash and the 2009 credit crunch. The book is divided into six chapters which each focus on different problem areas for Britain, including: Financially Bankrupt; Residentially Bankrupt; Politically Bankrupt; Morally Bankrupt; Emotionally Bankrupt; and Environmentally Bankrupt. The research for the book is based on population statistics, and the empirical data as well as additional material for the book are available on the companion website to the book: <http://www.sasi.group.shef.ac.uk/bankruptbritain/>. By contrast, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation report *Recession, Poverty and Sustainable Livelihoods in Bradford* (Brill, et al 2011) provides a more detailed analysis of the impacts of recession on specific communities in Britain. Based on an eight-month qualitative study of the impact of the recession on people living in poverty in Bradford, this research policy report

suggests that Bradford has been hit particularly hard by the recession and identifies policy changes that could help to make the community more resilient. The research team worked in partnership with community researchers who had local contacts and direct experience of poverty. The report identified ill health (particularly mental health), the experience of trauma, inadequate incomes, widespread crime and anti-social behaviour as barriers for local residents to moving out of poverty, which were compounded by the experience of recession (associated with job losses and cuts and rising food and fuel costs). The report highlights the importance of an integrated and holistic approach to social policy and warns of the dangers of reforms proposed by the current UK government that could trap people in situations of 'in-work poverty'.

A number of studies have explored the prospects for regeneration in the context of post-industrial change and economic restructuring since the 1970s, and in more recent different economic times. (cf. Byrne 2001; Dicks 2000; Imrie, Lees, and Raco 2009; Lupton 2003; Maginn 2004; Wallace 2010; Winson and Leach 2002). The interdisciplinary book *Understanding the Urban* (Byrne 2001) is an early example of such an investigation in the context of a post-industrial and globalising world. The research draws on complexity theory and mixed methods, including analyses of novels, travel writing, film/TV, and online 'virtual footprints' of cities. Several interrelated themes of the urban are explored, including the restructuring of urban employment, the transformation of 'culture' in cities, locality and community, cities in a world system, the production and reproduction of the built environment, and urban politics and governance. Chapter three is the most relevant chapter in terms of theorising and operationalising 'community', entitled: 'Locality and community: the significance of place'. In this chapter, Byrne explores community as networks and as locality, using the case example of Katowice/ Upper Silesia in Poland as an example of locality and community in the context of restructuring. Another early example is Dick's (2000) study of the relationship between heritage, place identity and community through the case study of the Rhondda Heritage Park, the only colliery building left in a Welsh valley that once had sixty-six deep mines. The research is based on qualitative interviews, focus groups and audio-visual analysis, and uses narrative and discourse analysis to interpret the qualitative findings. This book examines contradictions in the concept and practice of heritage as a culture-led regeneration strategy through a study of the Rhondda Heritage Park, the only significant public memorial to the history of mining in the Rhondda community. The main aim of the book is to analyse heritage as a political, social and economic resource, as cultural

representation, and as a framework for people's historical understanding and memory. More recently, *Regenerating London* (Imrie, Lees, and Raco 2009) explores theories and practices of urban regeneration in one of the fastest changing world cities. The book highlights paradoxes and contradictions in urban policy and offers an evaluation of the contemporary forms of urban redevelopment. Of particular interest in relation to the study and operationalisation of 'community' is Part IV: Community Governance and Urban Change, which includes contributions about the reworking community in the South Bank, the disputed place of ethnic diversity in a street market in East London, the transformation of Hackney's Holly Street Estate, and young people and the regeneration of the Kings Cross Tens Estate. In this context, communities are framed primarily as 'communities of place' nestled within the larger city, through the lens of social and economic change, and changes and tensions in demographic profiles (based on age, ethnicity and social class). Another recent UK study (Wallace 2010) examines the interconnected uses of 'community' in government rhetoric and practice, drawing on qualitative research conducted in a New Deal for Communities (NDC) neighbourhood under New Labour. The research draws on the experiences of residents living in an NDC neighbourhood defined as 'socially excluded', including interviews with a range of residents either individually or in focus groups. The book explores why the concept of community was so central to New Labour and policy actors, and what it meant for neighbourhoods residents who were part of the NDC regeneration project. The book explores the political, emotional and cultural impact of the regeneration experience for residents, linking the contested conceptualisation and mobilisation of 'community' to debates on citizenship and social exclusion. This critical evaluation and reflection on past government policies related to community development is a useful reminder of the importance of looking to the past as well as the present and future in thinking about community development.

3 Conclusions

Rather than seeking to summarise the above discussions we will by way of concluding offer ten propositions about the current state of community research in terms of theory and method, and an assessment of prospects for the coming period. These propositions can be regarded as arising from the discussions of the 100 pieces of research considered above, but they have also been crystallised through analysis of the fourteen interviews that we conducted with the broad range of researchers with recent experience of undertaking research in the field of 'community', and our discussions with members of the project advisory board. In these

interviews and discussions we solicited views on trends in the methods used in community research in recent decades and assessments of prospects for the field in the next decade. The views expressed to us in these contexts came from community researchers from a broad range of disciplines and methodological traditions, and although they have not been attributed to identifiable individuals here, we are of course very grateful to them for their input.

The first concluding proposition is that **methodological pluralism in the field of community research is here to stay for the foreseeable future**. This is an unsurprising conclusion given the diversity of methods found in the 100 items published since 2000 that were considered above, but it is worth noting the rationales for this offered by our respondents. These were often pragmatic: community researchers will be guided by a philosophy of ‘whatever works’ (interviewee G), and there is likely to be a continuation of the trend towards research being conducted in large teams in which mixed methods feature, at least insofar as funded research is concerned. Methodological pluralism is nothing new in the field of community research, as interviewee G noted when discussing his previous research in which he and his team had ‘used every technique in the book’. Some comments expressed reservations about methodological pluralism when practised as mixed methods underpinned by an ill-considered faith in ‘triangulation’, which was regarded as an over-used word and vulnerable to the criticism that in methods as elsewhere ‘two wrongs don’t make a right’ (interviewee L), but this was not an argument against methodological pluralism ‘in principle’.

The second proposition, that **methodological pluralism in community research is assisted by interdisciplinary working**, is again an expected theme to find expressed, but again no less important for that. Interviewee F spoke with enthusiasm about interdisciplinary team working as a methodological learning experience: ‘I all my projects I had sociologists, I had social psychologists, I had human geographers, I had literature people, I had musicologists, anthropologists, and then we taught across, I taught the geographers how to deal with linguistic data and they taught me how to think about space in a slightly more sophisticated way’. Similarly interviewee A spoke of how team working had allowed her to learn new quantitative survey skills but also archeological methods in relation to archived material, ‘working with archeologists for the first time was good because they are able to draw connections that nobody else could draw’. Moving out of one’s disciplinary silos is associated in this point of view with moving out of one’s methodological silos as well.

The third proposition is that **the case for methodological pluralism, openness and innovation remains strong**. Just as in the 100 published items considered in the annotated bibliography, so also among interviewees it was the case that established methods were regarded as having not lived up to expectations. A common cause of concern was that established methods had proved better at reaching certain populations than others, and methods needed to be more inclusive if previously neglected groups were to be given a voice. For interviewee D children were a prime example of a section of the population that community researchers had tended not to reach, and her experiences of working with a research design that ‘did include children right from the start’ was a positive one. Similar concerns were expressed by interviewee K about how conventional methods did not capture well the ‘racialised’ character of communities, especially where this was a feature of social exclusion. The challenge of capturing ‘hidden’ social phenomena is well-known, but the message was not a counsel of despair, since new methods and new approaches do have the capacity to reveal aspects of communities that have gone relatively unremarked upon by previous generations of researchers.

Proposition four is that **collaborative methods have a pragmatic as well as an ethical justification**. The case for using collaborative methods that involve members of communities being researched because it is the right thing to do has been made widely, as was noted in relation to a number of items in the annotated bibliography. The title of Williamson and DeSouza’s book *Researching with Communities* is instructive in this respect, as a contrast to researching *on* communities, to take one example. But interviewee K added to this the observation that ‘there’s a growing weight of evidence that the black and minority ethnic groups are utterly pissed off with researchers coming and talking to them and going away and nothing changes’, echoing the complaint that ‘we’re tired of being asked what we think and nothing changes’. This view that some communities will not grant access to researchers unless they adopt a collaborative approach reinforces the argument that community research ought to be about working with communities, and is supplemented by a third line of reasoning that better quality data are generated as a result. Interviewee M spoke in these terms about methods involving ‘co-production’ and ‘knowledge exchange’, and suggested that developments in art work were pioneering this type of work. Interviewee J also spoke of

researching with a community and through recruitment using snowballing being oversubscribed with offers to participate, ‘we got more volunteers than we actually needed’, adding that this was ‘unusual’.

Proposition five is that **the re-thinking of methods used to capture ‘community’ go hand-in-hand with the re-thinking of the concept of community**. Interviewee G put this well in relation to a discussion of action research by saying that ‘community isn’t just an abstract concept but is actually the group of people that you are working with around some kind of particular issue’. In this particular case the re-thinking of the methods used to capture ‘community’ led to a questioning of the value of area-based conceptions of ‘community’, and this chimed with many comments made in the interviews anticipating the growth of work on non-spatial communities. Thus interviewee E spoke of the ‘huge amount of work that will continue to become more and more important in non-spatial communities’, which will be necessary ‘to get to grips with the relationship between social networks, technologically-mediated social networks, and geographical communities’. Interviewee E’s experiences of trying to capture mobility within and between communities had a parallel in interviewee F’s work on transnational communities and her frustrations with ‘methodological nationalism’ and its tendency to associate mobile individuals with one place rather than the several places between which they moved.

Proposition six is that **community research that is comparative has much to offer**. The interviews here echoed points exemplified in the 100 annotated bibliography items, that comparisons of different neighbourhoods, comparisons of the experiences of community phenomena in different countries, and comparisons between different periods of time can all be most revealing. However, the bases of comparisons do have to be carefully thought through. Interviewee D’s research comparing communities in different locations within one larger geographical region was successful, she thought, because ‘there are very big, quite strenuous questions to be asked about the basis on which you’re making your comparison and how you’re choosing your cases for comparison’, and in this instance it involved careful consideration of the historical comparisons that were also involved, which were important in seeking to escape the ‘presentism’ (or lack of historical perspective) characterising much contemporary work. Interviewee B also enthused about the potential of comparison to

highlight differences between communities, including ones that could then be used to comment on policy issues

Proposition seven is that '**community**' is not a term that should be taken at face value. This is simply a re-statement of the point noted above in the discussion of Raymond Williams's analysis of how 'community' is not a neutral word, but it is an important re-statement given that each generation sees new efforts to impose particular definitions. Interviewee K was particularly mindful of how 'the language of community development gets hijacked, distorted and manipulated by political actors and used and abused', while Interviewee G noted of the word 'community' that 'there is an enormously cynical use of it in relation to regeneration strategy'. In the analysis of policy initiatives in general Interviewee L recommended that careful attention be paid to 'the rhetoric and the reality', while Interviewee K advocated 'pushing people very hard to say what they mean by "community"'.

Following on from this, proposition eight is that **the language through which methods of community research are discussed suffers from a lack of consensus**. Again this proposition will be well-known in the sense that the object being researched, 'community', is open to numerous competing understandings, but the point applies more generally. Interviewee C, when talking about the methods through which community phenomena might be visualised, noted that the visualisation of community through mapping techniques was quite distinct from visualization understood as the use of photographs: 'they're just different things.... Just because they share the word visual, I don't actually think they're all that close together'. Other examples of the same term being used to cover a range of methodological practices include social network analysis (which can be used to describe work that is highly quantitative or work that is more using the term as a metaphor), comparative analysis (where the criteria of comparison are made more explicit in some studies than they are in others), and mobile methods (which can be used to describe methods seeking to capture mobility or methods such as walking interviews in which mobility is not the object of enquiry but a means of data collection). The very general term 'innovative methods' is also the subject of much disagreement about what should be included.

Proposition nine is that **there is a strong case for full reporting of the research methods used in community research**. When identifying exemplars of community research, several interviewees selected studies that included full accounts of the methods that had been employed, sometimes as methodological appendices, as in the case of Howard Newby's (1977) *The Deferential Worker* which interviewee B chose, John Rex and Robert Moore's (1967) *Race, Community and Conflict* which was selected by Interviewee K, or Ray Pahl's (1984) *Divisions of Labour* which Interviewee G picked out. Interviewee G also highlighted PhD theses as exemplars of good practice in this respect, because they typically have fuller discussions of the methods on which the research has been based than is often found in monographs and that it is possible to include in shorter articles in journals. Interviewee H also made the point that authors of research findings that challenge accepted ideas about community will need to have a defence against criticism that is likely to be directed at their methods of research.

Finally, proposition ten is that **community research matters**. The discussion of exemplars of community research included several classics that have stood the test of time not only in community research but in social science and the arts and humanities more generally. Interviewee D's choice of Michael Young and Peter Willmott's (1957) *Family and Kinship in East London* is a good example of a study that has had impact on a wider public, as is Interviewee N's choice of Frederic Thrasher's (1927) *The Gang* as an example of the work of the Chicago School. These two studies are of course historical examples of how community research has mattered in the past, but our contention is that contemporary community research continues in this tradition. We are confident that among the 100 items in our annotated bibliography on which this report is based there are studies that will stand the test of time just as well as these have, and for the same reason, that when it is conducted in a theoretically-informed and methodologically-rigorous fashion, community research matters.

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